



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

**Thursday, July 23, 2020 7:00 pm**  
In Person and Via Electronic Means Due to COVID-19

## **MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Mr. Henderson, Pastures District  
Mr. Powell, Middle River District  
Ms. Thornton, North River District  
Mr. Lawhorne, Riverheads District  
Ms. Carter, Board of Supervisors Liaison  
Ms. Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator

**ABSENT:** Mr. Journell, Beverly Manor District  
Mr. McHaffa, South River District  
Mr. Craig, Wayne District  
Mr. Morelli, Board of Supervisors Liaison  
Ms. Susie Miller, Sub-Committee

VIRGINIA: At the regular meeting of the Augusta County Internet Initiative (Broadband Committee) held on Thursday, July 23, 2020 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 physical quorum was not present.

The Committee reviewed the Policy on Electronic Meetings whereby members can participate in a Committee meeting through electronic communications in accordance with the provisions of Section 2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia. A member shall notify the Chair of the public body as to reason for not being able to attend the meeting in person. The public body shall vote at the beginning of the meeting to allow the member to participate remotely. Remote participation by a member is limited to two meetings each calendar year. The minutes shall reflect that the member participated remotely and the reason for such participation. Nothing in the policy precludes a member from attending electronically and not participating in a vote if a two meeting limit in a calendar year has already been reached by that member. Other than minutes, the Committee rarely has a need to vote on a regular basis. The consensus of the Committee was to proceed with the policy.

### **Adoption of the Minutes**

Minutes from the January 23, 2020, February 27, 2020, May 28, 2020 and June 25, 2020 meetings were not approved due to the lack of a physical quorum.

### **Comments by the Public**

None

### **Special Presentations**

None

## **Matters to be Presented by Sub-Committees**

None

## **Matters to be Presented by Staff**

Ms. Whetzel reviewed proposals submitted by providers for partnership on the VATI 2021 grant:

- **Rural Broadband Network Services (RBNS, dba High Speed Link.net)**  
6 towers with equipment, estimated 12000 households could be served.  
Followed areas in County RFI, serving Fort Defiance, Barren Ridge, Morris Mill and Spottswood areas of the County.
- **MGW Communications**  
3 Fiber to the Home projects with potential partnership with Highland County on application  
Addressed areas previously in grants – Deerfield and Middlebrook, noted interest in Morris Mill area, estimated 548 households could be served, excluding Morris Mill households.

The Board of Supervisors meets on August 12, 2020 and will address local match requests. Ms. Whetzel will follow up with the Committee as to projects to be pursued and the local match needed. Due to potential overlap in projects, there may be changes from the proposal to the application.

The grant application is due August 17, 2020. Sub-Committee involvement will be utilized as needed before then.

The effect of the pandemic on schools and telework has brought the need for better internet services to the forefront. Other localities appear to be using CARES funding for broadband. The funds are required to be spent by Dec. 30, 2020 and guidance does not allow for permanent infrastructure installation beyond the current pandemic. The County has authorized funds for Chromebooks for additional grade levels, which assists with the digital divide, although it is not internet service.

## **Old Business**

The Committee reviewed a list of grant opportunities included in the agenda package. Ms. Thornton noted that the following grants may be opportunities for the Committee to consider in the future: U.S. EDA (Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program) – Rolling submission, max \$300,000, money available until post new funding; Rural Development USDA Community Connect – eligibility depends on rural criteria; USDA Reconnect – eligibility depends on rural criteria. Most private foundation grants require a non-profit applicant, so a partnership would be required for a project. Grants are one item on the list in preparing a report to Board of Supervisors.

## **New Business**

Ms. Whetzel introduced Morgan Messer with Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC). Ms. Messer noted that SVEC is evaluating the feasibility of the Cooperative providing internet services. A study was completed in May 2020 and the SVEC Board of Directors will address it during the Strategic Planning Session in August. More information will be forthcoming as they decide the direction they wish to take on this topic. Due to COVID-19, a moratorium on payments has provided financial challenges to the cooperative.

Ms. Carter is reaching out to BARC to get information on their project in the near future.

## **Adjournment**

The next meeting will be held August 27, 2020 at 7 pm in a format to be determined. With no further discussion by the committee, the meeting adjourned.