Broadband Task Force April 7, 2021 @ 5:30 PM Meeting Agenda / Minutes

Attendees: Sally Greene (OC Commissioner)
               Earl McKee (OC Commissioner)
               Rep. Graig Meyer
               Sen. Valerie Foushee
               Rep. Dean Arp
               Jim Northrup (OC CIO)
               Vasu Kilaru (resident)
               Paul Cardillo (resident)
               Terri Buckner (resident)
               Todd Broucksou (resident)
               Pat Hull (resident)
               Doug Noell (Chief IT Operations Officer Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools)
               Victoria Deaton (Compliance Specialist Office of Institutional Equity and Inclusion Durham Tech)
               Jeff Sural (Director, NC Broadband Infrastructure Office) - VACATION
               Dr. Monique Felder (Superintendent, OC Schools)
               Dr. Kathleen Dawson (Deputy Superintendent, OC Schools)
               Laura Jensen (Clerk to the BOCC)
               Travis Myren (Deputy County Manager)
               Mark Johnson
               Jacci Ruhe (resident)

AGENDA

5:30 PM   Welcomes and introductions - Greene/McKee

5:35 PM   Legislative Updates - Sen. Valerie Foushee/Rep. Graig Meyer/Rep. Dean Arp

               • Comm Greene NCACC update

6:25 PM   Grants Update – Northrup/Myren

6:35 PM   Bureaucratic mechanisms counties have to undertake and accomplish large infrastructure goals. -
Myren

6:45 PM   Update on "what's out there?" consequential technology on the horizon and beyond the horizon–
Group/Northrup
                       •   Fiber maps
                       •   Wireless Options
                               o   Fixed Wireless
                               o   Satellite
                       •   Models for success: what are other counties doing?
                               o   Person
                               o   Wake
                               o   Rowan
6:50 PM   Old Business/New Business/Housekeeping
                       •   Action Register
                       •   Minutes/Notes approval

7:00 PM   Adjourn

Action Items:
        ACTION: Meetings are every other Wednesday
        ACTION: Next meeting April 21st at 5:30 – All
                Proposed agenda items:
- Devise short and long term strategies (Todd has suggestions)
- Invite Open Broadband, Piedmont Electric and River Street to present to group
        Action Items carried over from last meeting:
        ACTION: Provide list of all county owned land – Northrup
        ACTION: Public MCNC fiber maps – Broucksou
        ACTION: Commissioner Greene requests that OC put together a synopsis of grants that we are eligible for (federal funding, block grants, etc); Northrup/Myren (Northrup=>will provide weekly progress reports)
        ACTION: Disruptive technologies to consider – All (Northrup will put together a starter list)

Discussion notes:
Sally/Earl – welcomes and introductions
Legislative updates:

Graig Meyer/Dean Arp – been working on BB in OC/NC for quite a while; know where GREAT Grants are going to be and where federal RDOF grants are going to be; need to figure out what states are doing, what counties are doing and where to close the broadband gaps; need to speed up the timeline (providers)

Valerie Foushee – little movement in senate chamber so far; now interested in movement, more interest now b/c of NCACC

Rep Arp – working on rural BB for 3-4 years; trying to address insurmountable odds; more encouraged than ever before; not only raised awareness of issue/lack of BB in NC (same struggles across entire US)

Proposed legislation? Anything have a chance of passing in this session?

- o Arp – have seen a lot more bills filed in Senate; going through bills filed on Senate side

- o House bill filing is longer but expect significant bills to be filed here

- o Key to talking about BB is you have to identify the problem you're trying to solve first – adequate service, high bills, etc? Identify problem; discuss money – state has never been in a better position to put money forward for this, >$10million/year; coming is a tremendous influx from federal program and trying to align state funding with federal $$; synergistic – expand areas with state dollars and leverage state/federal funding; need to be careful to not step on other programs; map is to keep focusing funding where it needs to go; regulations – what is artificially limiting BB deployment through regulations and what is state's role in that? Couple of years ago co-locating/leasing on state properties; electric co-ops – allow

them to partner with private partners, required removing some; "take rate" – road has broadband access but not everyone wants to get it; "take rate" = # of people who're willing to pay $$ for access to line; tier 1 and 2 counties don't have infrastructure; haven't tried to influence the "take rate"; what is government's involvement? Often agreement in goals just differ in how to achieve them.

- o Questions:
    - Comm Greene:
        - OC is tier 3 county but have significant areas who cannot get access, some with unreliable service, some can't have more than one family member that can be on a meeting at the same time
        - Understand grants are available that we're not eligible for because tier 3 county; how to rework rules so that OC is qualified/eligible?
        - OC in between mountains and coast – unable to provide extensive coverage because terrain isn't flat/unobstructed
    - Rep Arp
        - Private providers – population density not high enough to be financially feasible
        - Start in rural counties – open last round of $$ to statewide areas not just tier 1&2; GREAT grant and other things working on won't be available to all tier counties
        - Maps – changing from tiered county system to maps system which will make funding available to households in need regardless of tier of county they're in
        - Jim points out that Piedmont Electric, River Street attending (listening) but not participating
        - When look at policy decisions, what can we do, what's the timeline we envision, haven't leveraged network out, provided hotspots but that was limited; as a matter of policy, try to be technology agnostic; expect to see "free market/competition" – satellite service (may be more than a year away); state to try and invest money as a viable technology (low earth satellite); need to invest in multiple technologies; incentivize the speed -was 10/1, now 25/3 gets bonus points for grant
        - GREAT grant was to provide $$ that normalized the cost that would differentiate density and "take rate" to make BB affordable
    - Jim
        - Maps – need is wherever there is only one landline provider in County, that's where need better service
        - Service delivery – average cost per mile; problem is areas where there's no competition; no regulation around forcing competition
    - Terri

- Any discussion to allow local govts to build/operate their own fiber networks like Wilson and Salisbury?
  - Rep Arp: Wilson (success), Salisbury (not); Salisbury experience – system built w/tax $$ then went in search of partner; had debt load so ended up selling the system; no matter how much money state puts in, still needs to be a partnership with providers; how to prevent govt being in competition with private providers? Proper use of tax dollars?
  - Terri – govt has resources for putting in fiber (much like roads, sidewalks, etc); situation of putting in fiber not attractive to private providers so govt should put the fiber in; Terri clarifies that fiber be installed as work being done (ie. lay fiber when sidewalks being built)
  - Rep Arp – fiber different than sidewalk/roads; allowing providers to make money off of govt fiber work; (Terri clarifies that fiber be installed as work being done (ie. lay fiber when sidewalks being built))
- Maps – are these maps that already exist or are in process of creating new maps?
  - Rep Arp: Maps done in dept of IT (BB office); base map is consistent with FCC map down to the census block; taking FCC maps as a base then enhance them with detail from BB office so can better identify areas that are unserved even though census block implies that all are served; enhance detail of existing FCC maps
- Todd
  - If County put fiber in from a grant (fed, state), could they lease fiber to ISP? Issues with ISP making money off leased fiber? Lease ISP #1 and offer same price to ISP #2 and ISP #3 assuming ISP's agree to maintain
  - Rep Arp – can lease fiber and avoid constitutional question; current law allows counties to participate in public/private partnerships like county putting in fiber then leasing to private partners; working on putting money toward public/private partnerships
  - OC going to get lots of money from feds so can give grant money toward partnerships – state is changing rules/laws to make the partnership easier
- Sen Foushee – proposed legislation; BB is a utility
- Comm McKee – classic catch 22; can't build infrastructure to the point that need to with the legal restrictions currently in place; going to have to be a dual effort, federal money that can be applied to this problem; need enticements to providers for service provision/maintaining service
  - Rep Arp – ie. county asset has fiber ring, getting a provider to come in; who's responsible for upkeep?; Governor will soon be unveiling big plans for BB
- NCACC – Comm Greene, using OC example for lobbying for legislation; proposed legislation – where money goes to ISP and use that money to

pair up with govt; when NCACC is ready to lobby for specific legislation, they will let us know so we can get involved

- Sen Foushee - County caucus, working on Senate Bill 689 (draft) (bipartisan - introduced yesterday) will expand BB in unserved areas, create partnership to allow use of county asset; another bill on house side; bill that senate is pushing that will allow financial assistance to residents who don't have means to access high-speed internet in their area

Grants updates: Jim/Travis – trying to get up with the state to go through which are available and not; American Rescue Plan $$ - still don't have guidance but BB is listed though don't have restriction info yet; must be spent by end of Dec 2024

Bureaucratic mechanisms: Travis – should funding be authorized, have to take a couple of different legislative actions to spend money, RFP/bid -> evaluate (OC and members of public) – Task Force would be good audience for that; then would need to be approved so can take some months; once details are laid out, Jim/Travis can move quickly

Jim – what happens in the case of no $$? How would bonds work?

Travis – general obligation bond can be approved by voters

Update on "What's out there": In past meetings talked about disruptive technologies; fiber strategic plans; Jim shares map (proposed fiber that we wanted to install ourselves) with group; fiber assessment to show all the kinds of fiber in the county ie. Cable TV fiber around the county (2017) – highlights the tale of two cities, fiber in populated areas but not in northern/western OC; combined map – DSL investment (green line) is where you see telephone fiber; no home run back to H'boro where Century Link is providing service; if need copies of maps individually, contact Jim. Leveraging fiber – not a good business case to expand fiber to places without BB; fixed wireless, LED, satellite (NetStat, Starlink); radio spectrum has limited bandwidth, LTE much better; cell phone companies have infrastructure but can't lower rates which would be required to be more affordble

County success models – Person County project where state let private industry on their towers (Highway Patrol); Rowan County – dept manager, contracting with Open Broadband; struggling to get that off the ground and having same challenges as OC – lack of vertical assets, not looking to build towers. OC in year 3 of 3 year contract, OBB learned a lot

Need to approve minutes/notes from last meeting

Meeting frequency every other week!!!

Review Action Register

- Hear from Piedmont Electric, River Street and Open Broadband next meeting
- Anecdotally – Ting Fiber Internet (Holly Springs) - offers cellphone service and high speed internet – lowers price and increases speed (currently advertising $89/mo + startup costs)

- Minutes approved with adjustment to add Open Broadband to list of vendors to present
- Suggested agenda items for next meeting
    - What is short term strategy and then long term strategy?
    - Put item on agenda for devising short term solution since fiber will be long term solution
    - Todd has suggestions/ideas for short term and long term solutions at next meeting
- Move to adjourn; seconded