

Monday, July 10, 2017

Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes

Washington Fire Dept. Building
10 Firehouse Lane
Washington, VA 22747
4:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Lesinski; committee members Dant, Eitner, Goshorn, Mahoney, Summers; Outreach Strategy advisor Whitfield.
Absent: Zuschlag

At 4:04 PM Chair John Lesinski called the meeting to order, welcoming the visitors from the Center for Innovative Technology (CIT), Chuck Kirby, CIT's new Broadband Project Director, and Jean Plymale, Broadband Project Manager; as well as the 17 community members present. Lesinski then circulated a sign-up sheet for community members in attendance to receive email updates and information on the committee's activities as they unfold.

The committee considered the June meeting minutes and approved them as amended via the discussion below:

- Dant suggested attaching for the record the awareness campaign document that was mentioned in the minutes as approved with "no changes." This will be done via posting on the BB website.
- Eitner: Awareness campaign focused effectively on the how of the communication plan, but little on the what—suggested specifics allowing community members to understand key findings and facts surrounding BB in Rapp. Co. Summers suggested we give quick technical facts but not too many findings so as not to bias the survey results. (This exchange was a reaction to the minutes, not a proposed amendment.)

The Chair then suggested that the New Business items on the agenda be re-ordered to feature the Broadband Survey presentation by CIT first. The agenda was adopted as amended.

The CIT then presented its proposed broadband survey, interspersed with questions from the floor.

The online survey results will allow community members and potential service members to see statistically and graphically where potential users and needs are located across the county. Slides from Franklin County were presented, illustrating how specifically need is mapped and missing coverage illustrated. They stressed that addresses are crucial to have in order to do

such mapping accurately, and this means location of residences.

The conclusions from such findings can further refine the public awareness campaign once we know these details. The survey measures demand both for residential and business users. CIT shares all data it collects with the concerned county, citing addresses but not names. It is up to the county to decide how to further use and share the data it receives. Plymale noted that resulting upgraded service typically does not unfold for everyone at the same pace nor via the same technologies, whether affected by local demand or topography.

Other data, including information this committee has collected and forwarded to CIT, and tools are drawn on to further identify potential county "assets" for siting towers, antennas and hosting potential for same. Known service providers have already been alerted that CIT's process is underway in Rapp. County, and have an opportunity to indicate to CIT any specific information they would seek as well as data they possess that may inform the process.

Discussion ensued about special services and reduced rates sometimes available to county/public service agencies, which will be part of the data report CIT provides to the county.

Jean Plymale then ran through several slides illustrating various features of the survey instrument, pointing out different question items and explaining what such questions can help assess and understand needs. Community and committee members offered suggestions to help CIT adjust its survey to the realities of the county.

Discussion ensued about residents who cannot complete an online survey for lack of internet access at home. An alternative option will be to provide a print-out of the survey which can be distributed widely via meetings, school packets, booths at events or other public locations, etc., and then draw on local students to help with manual data entry of those paper surveys into the online data base.

The CIT presentation was also to include a video on the situation in Franklin County schools that limited what the teachers and students could do with insufficient broadband access. The sound from the computer being too weak to hear, CIT promised to forward a link to this video.

Rappahannock County High School principal Michael Tupper was present and assured the committee that the school and its students are committed to helping with survey completion and data entry of paper surveys.

Outreach advisor Jane Whitfield then made a presentation on the public awareness campaign that she is developing. She distributed an updated version of her first draft paper outlining the strategy, presented at the June meeting. She stressed that the primary intended outcome of the outreach is to make sure people know what the broadband committee is doing and to disseminate information that will motivate residents to complete the CIT broadband survey. The CIT representatives pointed out how important it is that the county itself “own” the survey process and work to increase community buy-in. Chair Lesinski confirmed that the Supervisors have approved a modest budget, to cover postage, printing, advertising, etc. to support the outreach.

A question was raised about the most effective distribution of the paper surveys. CIT indicated that some counties have done direct mail of the whole survey to all residents; others relied only on a post card with the web link and offering those needing a paper survey information on getting one. CIT also mentioned that potential grant funding sources are particularly interested in supporting populations that do not now have Internet, so getting the voices of the currently unserved included is important. Outreach advisor Whitfield reflected that her experience shows that direct mail of the survey is likely to result in a higher response rate. It was also pointed out that the county’s Foothills Forum survey was mailed out and got a very high response rate. Another option, should response rates be running low, is to invite residents to call a phone number and be interviewed over the phone.

The question of the survey collection window was raised—30 days, 45 days, 60 days or longer? An argument for a shorter period is that the window for available grant applications supporting a plan based on the survey findings, such grant opportunities may close by the end of 2017. However, such grants require applicants have a partner in place, so the anticipated cycle in mid-2018 may be the more realistic target. On the other hand, it was pointed out that should things drag out too long, there may be a political cost if it is viewed that the initiative is not moving forward.

Chuck Kirby pointed out that the majority of the responses will come in during the first 30 days, so extending that period provides limited additional pay-off. If extended longer, a strong publicity drive should then be instituted to get the word out to those who have still not submitted a survey. Whitfield suggested that perhaps we assess response rates at the 30-day mark, and then adjust outreach strategies to respond accordingly.

In sum, there was consensus that a postcard should be developed soon that can be direct mailed to parallel the go-live date of the online survey, around

September 15.

Whitfield then reviewed the action items for this month in the outreach strategy document, relating them to the individual members' task commitments made at the previous meeting. She asked committee members to be ready to respond to meeting the needs on the list via email, in order to fine-tune what possibilities on the list are most important. She will also develop some talking points to give committee members, which will allow the messaging to be consistent.

Public comment: Much Q&A came as the meeting unfolded, but Lesinski also invited further comment from community members towards the meeting's end. Suggestions included:

- contacting state and congressional representatives about what is going on
- asking community members to spread the word via their own personal networks
- include the text-based Rappnet listserv in outreach messaging.

The next broadband committee meeting will be held on Monday, August 14 at 7:30 PM. Location to be determined.

A motion was made to adjourn at 6:07 PM with unanimous approval.