

AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY BROADBAND AUTHORITY HELD ON MONDAY JULY 19, 2021 AT 5:30 P.M. AT THE RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY COURTHOUSE, 250 GAY STREET, WASHINGTON, VIRGINIA.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Donehey called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

Authority Board Members present: Debbie P. Donehey; Christine Smith; I. Christopher Parrish, Keir A. Whitson.

Others present: Garrey W. Curry, Jr., FOIA Officer; Margaret Bond, Secretary.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Donehey led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Chair Donehey requested that attendees observe a moment of silence

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Mr. Whitson moved to adopt the Agenda as presented. Mr. Parrish seconded the motion. The motion to adopt the Agenda carried unanimously.

Aye: Donehey, Smith, Parrish, and Whitson.

Nay:

Abstain:

MINUTES FOR ADOPTION

Mr. Whitson moved to adopt the minutes from Broadband Authority meetings May 17, June 7, June 11, June 17, and June 21, 2021¹as presented. Vice Chair Smith seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes carried unanimously.

Aye: Donehey, Smith, Parrish, and Whitson.

¹ PDF versions of these minutes, plus the four PDF file attachments for the May 17th minutes are attached to the agenda for this July 19th 2021 meeting, posted on BoardDocs July 16th.

Nay:

Abstain:

PUBLIC COMMENT

Demaris Miller, Hampton District – Ms. Miller commenced her comments with an expression of gratitude and relief that the County was moving ahead with broadband plans. However, Ms. Miller urged caution on the Authority Board. “We were one of the first in this County to put up a pole for Virginia Broadband.” she continued. It meant, she said that a dozen of her neighbors could tie into her set up and get broadband as well, just using he one 65-foot pole. Then she moved to another section (sic) and switched to Piedmont Broadband. Both of these, Ms. Miller pointed out, were local companies and they were *very* good to work with.

Ms. Miller acknowledged there are currently many areas in the County that do not have good broadband service or none at all. And, she said, the same is true for cell service. She went on to tell the Authority Board that she had reviewed one of the proposals from one of the companies vying for this grant, and she saw that it was primarily owned by Chuck Akre². She conceded Mr. Akre might be a very fine and generous person, but she said there are those who think Patrick O’Connell³ is the 500-pound gorilla of town of Little Washington. If he is, Chuck Akre is the 30-ton King Kong for Rappahannock County. He now owns the largest tract of land in this County, he is going to be building out the Rush River Commons, swamp notwithstanding, and he has enough money to buy the entire county. He (Chuck Akre) also has a very large hand in the Foothills Forum.

His Company, Ms. Miller described, wants to have a non-compete clause in the contract proposed for the County. “If there is anybody who should have competition,” Ms. Miller opined, “it is Chuck Akre. Ms. Miller identified herself as an “inveterate capitalist” who likes competition. We are all better off for it, she stated. “We are better off with Piedmont Broadband and Virginia Broadband and compete (sic)”, she said. Ms. Miller asserted that the County is *not* better off when it joins hands with a giant company and then doesn’t allow competition. She concluded by urging the Broadband Authority to “see what it can do with local people.”

Deak Deakins, Hampton District – With a few exceptions, Mr. Deakins said, the members of the Authority Board, which also comprises the County’s Board of Supervisors, either have a short-term memory problem, or they have no problem breaking promises. He explained that he was in the courtroom (where the Broadband Authority meets) when the Authority was authorized. Mr. Deakins identified Mr. Parrish, in particular, as telling the public under no circumstances would there be any use of taxpayer funds (for broadband development). Mr. Deakins said he subsequently found out that the Authority Board was going to recommend the Board of

²Little Washington resident and founder, chairman and chief investment officer of Akre Capital management, LLC an asset management firm located in Middleburg, Virginia.

³ Chef and proprietor of The Inn at Little Washington.

Supervisors use about \$50,000 of funds provided by the County for this purpose. He asked for an explanation as to why and if this money is money the Authority Board thinks is free from the federal government, in Mr. Deakins' opinion, there is no such thing. "It all has a string attached to it," he said. Mr. Deakins claimed it (using the \$50,000 from the County for broadband) looks like a renege on a promise and, he stated, as a County resident he was not interested in paying for somebody else's broadband.

[At this juncture, Mr. Frazier entered the courtroom and joined the rest of the Broadband Authority Board members].

Page Glennie, Jackson District – Mr. Glennie started out by saying he was very happy that progress was moving forward on broadband, because it is needed, he said. He said he was also interested in what the Broadband Authority members have learned from their RFI. Mr. Glennie described his "take aways" from the RFI are that (1) we have a small company that says the schedule (for preparing and applying for a VATI grant in September) is non-executable; (2) there is a very large company that didn't seem to want to spend a lot of time putting together a proposal; and (3) there is another company that seems as if it is trying to limit competition. He wasn't sure what that clause (in paragraph 8 of their Memorandum of Understanding) means. "Does that mean," he queried, "that you cannot issue a permit to any competitor that wants to put up a tower in the County?"

Overall, Mr. Glennie continued, the Authority Board needs to, before it goes much further into this, that it get technical, procurement, and legal counsel – people with experience in this area. Without this guidance, he said, it puts the Authority board in a very poor negotiating position.

Mark Anderson, Piedmont District – For the fourth time, Mr. Anderson said, I am in the position to say: Page Glennie is absolutely right. It feels good doing that, too, he quipped. There is a lot to be gleaned from the RFI responses, he continued. "There are nuggets in each one."

He reminded the Authority Board that Governor Northam's blueprint for counties said try to get responses to their RFI, and if nobody responds, call us (Department of Housing and Community Development). "We don't have to do that," he said, "because we have three decent responses, and we are in a pretty good position for a rural county because we get to pick and choose from three reasonably responsive documents."

Mr. Anderson said he noticed, in terms of wireless equipment, it appears it can meet the 100/100 Mbps standard which if you get top-of-the-line equipment. He pointed out that the Madison Gigabit response indicated the price of such equipment was not that high. He went on to caution the Authority Board not to be too hasty, as Demaris Miller said (above comments) to commit to one solution until it has to. Maybe, he said, the Board could parcel the solutions out among other parts of the County. Mr. Anderson reiterated his comments from previous Authority Board meetings, that the County still needs its own plan for broadband development. "I wouldn't trust some private company," he said, "to put a plan together and then have the County rely on it."

Mr. Anderson pointed out that, for the County go put together its own broadband plan it would have to address the “unspeakable term” of GIS. Mr. Anderson said he had a plan for how to get the GIS mapping information the County would need that would only be shared with County officials, and which he would disclose to those officials later.

David Konick, Stonewall District – Mr. Konick identified two issues he wanted to address. He advised the Authority Board he had reviewed the responses it had received from the RFI. He indicated he was somewhat troubled by some of the things that some of the prior speakers had said.

Mr. Konick reminded the Authority Board that he had spent a considerable part of his career on public utility regulation. He was counsel to seventh largest gas distribution company in the United States for six years. After that he was senior consultant to the deputy chairman of the Federal Energy Commission of the Russian Federation. So, he said, I know about public utility regulation in two different countries. There are similarities, Mr. Konick explained, in the systems in both countries because they are both regulated monopolies. So, he continued, it is not without lack of experience that he said he agreed with everyone who spoke earlier that the Authority Board should be very cautious before it takes any steps on responding to the RFI submissions.

He encouraged the Authority to get counsel that is competent and knowledgeable because, he said, this is a very complicated deal. It involves upward of \$30 million, without reference to inflation. He pointed out to the Board that none of the documents included reference to inflation. He said the prices of commodities, fuel, rare metals, have all gone up 30-40-50% in the past seven months. If this thing gets built, Mr. Konick said, the 18 months out in the construction timeline could see the \$30 million projected cost rise to \$40 million or more. The Board, he continued, needs to understand what it is getting into and what the potential liabilities are if various contingencies happen or fail to happen. What then, he queried, is the County obligated for and who is going to pick up the pieces?

Mr. Konick assured the Board he was a proponent of improving broadband in the County. But, he said, not at the risk of the taxpayers who might be on the hook for: we don't even know what. He said the documents he reviewed had many what lawyers call hidden weanies. They seem very nice and the County is not committed to anything unless it signs and agrees in writing to do it. But, he advised, once you take the first step and sign something like that the Board needs to know what it is committed to and that it's clear that if things don't work out the County can get out.

Jill Jefferson, Piedmont District – Ms. Jefferson thanked everyone for their efforts in trying to promote broadband access in the community. She said she did not have broadband where she lives in terms of educational and employment or emergency access (sic). She said she was very grateful of the efforts to advance broadband access and was glad the Board had three good

responses to work with. She also agreed with earlier comments regarding caution in considering all the contingency clauses (sic) in the responses.

Chair Donehey closed the Public Comment session as there were no further speakers requesting to speak.

INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

At this juncture, Mr. Parrish announced he had just texted Chuck Akre regarding his interest in All Points Broadband – one of the three respondents to the RFI. Mr. Acre, said Mr. Parrish, just sent him a reply text that he no longer has any interest in All Points; he sold all of his interest in the company one month ago.

Mr. Parrish went on to comment that it was likely if the County did nothing to develop better broadband access, the federal and state governments would probably step in and do it for the County. However, he said, people are impatient to get something going now, and that requires the County to spend some monies, such as on legal counsel, to move the project forward. Regarding County's contribution of \$50,000 to the matching \$50,000 promised by both the PATH Foundation and an anonymous donor, Mr. Parrish pointed out: If we can get back \$100,000 by investing \$50,000 – that is a good return on investment.

Presentation – Chair Donehey introduced Mr. Richard Pate, CEO of Piedmont Broadband. Mr. Pate thanked the Board for the chance to address it. He said he had been consulting with Piedmont Broadband for a number of years and recently purchased the company along with his brother from Rich Shoemaker on 1 July 2021.

Mr. Pate referenced a “pretty aggressive” roadmap he had laid out for expanding Piedmont Broadband network over the next 36 months. Customer service, he emphasized is right at the top of Piedmont Broadband's priorities. He alluded to some concerns raised in social media, and said he had worked directly with many of those people privately to resolve their issues. He assured anyone listening to his presentation that they could always contact Piedmont Broadband at: support@piedmontbroadband.com.

In terms of the plan for Piedmont Broadband, Mr. Pate said they needed to address the stability of the network. Everyone is aware, he acknowledged, that whenever the storms come through there are outages. Piedmont's goal, he said, is to be a mission critical utility for Rappahannock county. Just because there is a lightning storm, the County can't function with massive broadband outages. He assured the Board that he had a plan to correct such problems and have the network 98% cleared up within the next twelve months. This plan includes hardening the base stations against the elements.

One of the things that plays a role in improving Piedmont's network is using a communication structure. He hesitated to use the word “tower”, people think: cell towers. Cell towers,

according to Mr. Pate, are very helpful to fixed wireless networks because anytime you can get height it is to your advantage. But, he acknowledged: “That kind of works against us here.”

Mr. Pate explained that the structures to which he was referring were towers of 80 feet or less, 12-18 inches wide. Not a massive structure, he said. The entire footprint of Piedmont’s towers will be 30 feet square, and all of them can be well-camouflaged. These towers play a huge role in the stability of the Piedmont Broadband network, Mr. Pate said.

The next thing Mr. Pate discussed on the Piedmont Broadband roadmap is the speed of broadband transmission. He told the Board the numbers (of upload and download speeds) that are called for in the VATI grant application requirements and the Broadband Authority’s RFI are a great goal. He said Piedmont had some customers who are receiving 25/3 Mbps, but also had customers who are not receiving anything near those numbers. There are a lot of pieces, he said, involved in building out the 25/3 Mbps capabilities to everyone in the County.

Mr. Pate pointed out that there are a number of ways to deliver 100/100 Mbps wirelessly. It is difficult, he said, to do this in a cost-effective way to 1,500 people. Actual costs of delivering that kind of service are probably more than what most people want to pay, he said.

The last point Mr. Pate addressed concerned security. There are a number of things Piedmont wants to do, he said, to improve security of the network.

Chair Donehey asked Mr. Pate to address the matter of scalability. She pointed out that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) called for plans scalable to 100/100 Mbps. She asked Mr. Pate about his expectations for Piedmont Broadband to approach these standards with the equipment and network design he was envisioning.

Mr. Pate responded that there is a reason that scalability is at the very end of the list for subscriber growth. He assured the Authority Board that these speeds are possible, but that Piedmont Broadband has to do a lot of work to get there. The foliage presents problems (with achieving these speeds) and a lot of Piedmont’s equipment is currently mounted in trees. With a wireless network, he explained, line of sight is everything. But, he continued, just because you can see between transmission points does not mean you are going to have a good radio connection.

Mr. Pate acknowledged that to improve speeds, Piedmont needs to have its base stations upgraded. This upgrade will include a tower, whether 80 feet or a cell tower and the tower must meet industry best practices structure. He assured the Board his job was to take the existing network and upgrade the whole architecture to meet industry best practices standards. He expressed confidence that his subscriber base supported bringing these upgrades to the network. For areas that cannot be upgraded with towers, he explained, Piedmont Broadband has access to high ground that will assist these measures. However, he reminded the Board that these improvements take time. This is one of the reasons, he explained, why he was not comfortable

with the speeds called for in the VATI grant application and the timeline of 18 months demanded to achieve them. Mr. Pate said Piedmont's plans are long term, and the scale will be there, but Piedmont has to improve the foundations of the existing wireless network first. That is why he said, Piedmont is not promising 100/100 Mbps right now, but it is confident it can achieve 24/3 Mbps for everyone on the network soon.

Mr. Whitson expressed his surprise that Piedmont Broadband had not responded to the Board's RFI. He said he understood that there were some technical parameters that Piedmont felt it could not meet. However, he said, it would have been a good idea for Piedmont Broadband to present in writing what Mr. Pate had just described so the Authority Board could have considered it along with the other submissions. Mr. Whitson clarified with Mr. Pate that the reason Piedmont Broadband did not respond was that it could not meet the speed requirements and timeline set by the VATI grant guidelines, and thus determined what it had to offer was not a good fit for the terms of the RFI?

Mr. Pate replied that the deployment timeline was a big factor discouraging Piedmont Broadband from submitting a response. He reiterated that the big issues presented included money issues, the timeline, and the speeds were all challenges for the network he acquired. Mr. Pate was also very concerned that whatever promises to the Authority or the County that Piedmont Broadband made would be promises it could keep. He said Piedmont was committed to continue investing in its and upgrading base stations that are a few years old for the 600 customers Piedmont is currently serving and upgrading its base station foundation for future 1,200 subscribers. He reiterated that he was not comfortable making a commitment to the timeline in the RFI.

Mr. Whitson commented he liked being able to call one of Piedmont's technicians, personally, when he needed help with his service. He pointed out that both Piedmont Broadband and Virginia Broadband are both small, local companies. A big part of doing business is assuring the 600 subscribers that they could get immediate service instead of being pawned off to a call center in the Philippines. He urged Mr. Pate to nail down the customer service side of his business which he described as Piedmont's competitive advantage over the bigger ISPs.

Mr. Whitson went on to describe what he called "clear limitations" to the technology used by Piedmont based on the topography of Rappahannock County. He told Mr. Pate that the County had just passed an ordinance that would allow for construction of 80-foot towers, primarily to assist Piedmont Broadband harden its infrastructure. He said the local government had gone out on a limb to allow Piedmont to obtain permits for such towers.

Mr. Pate indicated he would be submitting two, possibly three, applications to the County to build towers right away. This network improvement is a team effort. It is not "one stop shop", i.e., it is not something that a single provider is going to do, even a well-capitalized ISP. He said he welcomed competition because it is good for the consumer. It helps innovation and helps companies like Piedmont Broadband stay up on customer service.

Mr. Pate said there are other things Piedmont can do, such as providing a last-mile connection. That's something you are not going to get affordably with a traditional buried or aerial cable. Even Starlink option is not feasible for a lot of people. There's a lot of room for partnerships in building out the broadband network, according to Mr. Pate.

The way to deal with topology in Rappahannock County lends itself to a multi-effort approach, he said. You can get fiber on the main roads and use cell tower connections to get broadband as far in as you can get it and then use different wireless technologies and frequencies and radios to get the signal distributed throughout the rest of the County. In order to get this last build out, Mr. Pate explained, we need to get away from 900 MHz, even though that frequency has typically propagated well through foliage; it will not offer the performance people want in 2021. We also need to upgrade 2.4 GHz to 2.5GHz and specifically LTE at 3.65 GHz. Mr. Pate said he is going to redo Piedmont's frequency plan in a significant way. He said he was going to move to licensed frequencies for his radios and that's going to free up a lot more of the 5GHz frequency. This change will allow Piedmont to bring more bandwidth to its subscribers. That, he said, is how you are going to get higher upload and download speeds.

Right now, because of the frequency Piedmont is stuck with it has a very narrow bandwidth in which to operate, so that limitation affects the broadband speed to the subscriber. So when we move some of our distribution radios to higher frequencies this opens up more frequencies for Piedmont to use.

Mr. Pate said he supports getting as much fiber optic wire into the County as it can. He said he had been trying to get fiber for his system's backhaul via Hurricane Electric but had not been able to get it farther than Ashburn, Virginia. He said he is looking for a fiber solution to this issue. He said if he can get fiber to Rappahannock County through Hurricane Electric, the County would get top tier internet connectivity. He said this capability would also reduce Piedmont's cost because he can buy it wholesale and pass the savings on to the subscribers. Currently, he said, Piedmont's backhaul is three Gbps (gigabits per second). I can bring in 10 Gbps for significantly less money, he projected, and that would allow Piedmont to scale. He identified Sperryville and one other location which he could not disclose for 10 Gbps connection.

Mr. Whitson said he was eager to support Piedmont in its business expansion He said he favored a local business and thought Piedmont has a role in bringing broadband access, given the topography of the County and the type of technology it is using.

Mr. Whitson asked Mr. Pate if he could estimate, if the County were to consider a hybrid solution, the percentage of coverage Piedmont could provide to the inhabited portions of the County. What does Piedmont expect to offer eventually when its infrastructure is all hardened and it has done everything it wants to do? Mr. Whitson also asked Mr. Pate if he could address the confidence the County would like regarding capitalization, particularly if the County is going to support Piedmont's business development It's great, he said that Mr. Pate and his brother own

the company, but the County is at a point where it has to make big decisions for the public interest. Are you sufficiently capitalized to do what you say you are going to do?

Mr. Pate said there are a lot of places that simply are not going to be in Piedmont's model. There is no way the company could build the base station to reach them with any sort of return. He said it is possible for Piedmont to service between 1000 – 1,200 customers (by household or business), with an ultimate goal of 1,500 household or business subscribers. This figure compares to County data estimating approximately 3,100 households in the County. Of these there are approximately 1,500 households and businesses that are served by other ISPs. These, in Mr. Pate's estimate would not be interested in going with a wireless solution and become a Piedmont customer—unless the really liked Piedmont's customer service.

Mr. Whitson then clarified that the 1,500 figure Mr. Pate referenced is in addition to the 600 current customers, so that Piedmont is contemplating adding 900 additional subscribers. Mr. Pate concurred and said he anticipated a 36-month timeline to connect these additional subscribers. How much, Mr. Whitson, asked, would it cost to connect 900 more households, including towers and hardware? Mr. Pate said he was not prepared to discuss that figure just yet. He did say that he and his brother were middle class entrepreneurs and not as well-capitalized as the 30 ton gorilla referenced earlier. He said he and his brother were very financially stable.

Mr. Whitson followed with a question of confidence to Mr. Pate, i.e. are you in a position to deliver what you promise? — noting that what Piedmont Broadband was promising was relatively modest and, Mr. Whitson assumed, Piedmont Broadband would be offering a supplemental service in areas that might not be served by other technologies.

Mr. Pate responded that the “known unknown” (all wireless service providers) is the radios they will use. “I tell you the tower infrastructure pending what Rappahannock County requests. That infrastructure towers will cost between \$10 and \$15,000 apiece. Mr. Pate referenced the Ubiquity radios that were named in one of the RFI responses and said he thought the company was a fine company and revealed he had installed their equipment, along with others, for 13 years. There are good alternatives out there, he said, that are lower-priced than Ubiquity. There is also, he continued, more expensive equipment that is a perfect fit for the County. However, there is no way he could deploy this equipment with the storm damage that Rappahannock experiences. He alluded to the need to deploy this equipment on substantial towers – versus, trees – and assured the Authority Board that once he could deploy the higher-grade LTE equipment, there would be a massive increase in signal speed and reliability. He estimated the cost of a properly installed LTE base station at \$30 grand.

Vice Chair Smith asked Mr. Pate about providing FCC Form 477 data to be eligible to apply for a VATI grant. Mr. Pate acknowledged he had read the RFI response from Madison Gigabit which referenced Form 477 which Piedmont Broadband had not submitted to date. He explained that he was not involved in Piedmont's day to day[operations], which included completing and

submitting this form. Mr. Pate assured the Board of his intention to file Form 477 for the year he purchased Piedmont Broadband and every consecutive year forward.

Mr. Frazier clarified that the Board of Supervisors had not yet gotten so far as to approve the ordinance change allowing 80-foot towers. He asked Mr. Page about the reliability of his proposed network to handle delivery of 25/3 Mbps broadband service. Mr. Pate stated, unequivocally, that he considered this level of service an absolute minimum.

The Board thanked Mr. Pate for his presentation and Chair Donehey moved discussion into regular Agenda items. She reminded the Board she had previously told them of her invitation to speak with Mr. Daily and Supervisor Kullers of Warren County regarding a regional broadband coalition to supply fiber to the home, comprising Clark, Fredrick, Shenandoah, Augusta Rockingham, Page and Warren counties. In order to get answers about Rappahannock's eligibility or the desirability of its joining this regional coalition, Chair Donehey asked Mr. Lonnie Hamilton of the Department of Housing and Community and Kyle Rosner, Deputy Broadband Advisor for the Commonwealth of Virginia, to participate electronically in the ongoing Broadband Authority discussion.

Chair Donehey directed her question to Mr. Rosner regarding taking a regional approach to applying for VATI grant and how such approach would affect the likelihood of success in a VATI application, versus the Broadband Authority picking its own partner and going alone to apply for a grant with that partner.

Mr. Rosner explained that this round of VATI grant awards would have an emphasis on universality. It is in the interest of the Commonwealth to start checking entire counties off the list of adequately served jurisdictions. So, the emphasis for the Commonwealth is to have counties not go after VATI monies piecemeal, but address plans for deploying universal broadband service. He said Governor Northam had recently announced his intention to designate \$700 million of American Rescue Act (ARPA) money to broadband⁴. This amount, he said, would be in addition to the \$50 million currently available for the next VATI round. He said they estimate having between \$250-\$350 million additional dollars, total, available for VATI in September. He encouraged counties and providers to "think big"

Mr. Rosner then addressed the 18-month timeline called for in the VATI application for completing the project envisioned. He claimed this timeline was flexible, and not an absolute "shot clock" for ISPs to perform. Further, he explained that the actual 18-month clock did not start running until the contract was signed. He also said VATI administrators would consider requests for deadline waivers for delays in broadband network deployment. As for the requirement of filing FCC Form 477, Mr. Rosner assured the Board that, while the application

⁴ On August 16, 2021 Virginia lawmakers agreed to devote this amount of federal pandemic aid to broadband expansion. See: <https://www.viginiamercury.com/2021/08/16/how-virginia-plans-to-spend-700-million-on-broadband-expansion/> for additional details.

did call for copies of these filed forms, administrators would consider reviewing alternate information, if the ISP did not submit completed Form 477s with their application.

Universality, Mr. Rosner reiterated, is going to be a big scoring factor in evaluating VATI applications. The second big factor for VATI scoring is: Is the application cost efficient? With the anticipated increase in the size of the VATI pot of money, this factor would be less of a focus for grant administrators.

As Mr. Rosner explained, it is up to each county whether it wanted to apply for VATI money with one partner or join a regional approach. Although, there are advantages in leverage offered by being part of a regional broadband coalition, it's not going to that big of a scoring difference. So, he concluded, each county should think about what's right for it – not is this partnership going to score well.

On the question of timing for choosing a partner, Mr. Rosner assured the Board that it did not need to identify an ISP partner by the time of filing its Notice of Application in July; it only needed to choose a partner by the time of submitting the application in September. Mr. Hamilton echoed this explanation with the comment that there would be no negative implications attached to a county's notice of intent to apply, if it had not named an ISP partner by that date. Mr. Rosner did, however, urge Rappahannock County Board of Broadband Authority to get a partner soon to help draft and submit the grant application.

There followed more discussion of regional versus single-county partnerships for the VATI application. Mr. Rosner acknowledged that, generally, the Commonwealth likes regional projects because they are bigger and more efficiently deployed. He pointed out that VATI scoring does favor plans that achieve universal coverage or are part of a long-range plan that achieves universality in broadband coverage. He emphasized that Governor Northam has accelerated his goal of achieving universal broadband coverage in the Commonwealth from 2028 to 2024. The Governor wants Virginia to be one of the first states to cross the "digital divide" completely, he emphasized.

Chair Donehey presented her understanding from discussions with Mr. Daily and Supervisor Kullers of Warren County, that Rappahannock could sign on to the regional memorandum of understanding without any financial commitment or any long-term commitment.

Vice Chair Smith reflected on the downside of entering into a partnership arrangement with other counties is that we think this action will help the County become a bigger fish in the pond. However, the bottom line is, she observed is that we are still one of the smallest counties in the state, and the result is that the County still a small fish, regardless of the size of the partnership and the last (county) that gets attention. While you say that joining a regional coalition may help leverage the VATI application, she said, Rappahannock County may still be the last county that gets broadband service.

Mr. Rosner referenced Grayson County as one of the first counties that received VATI money, and it, he said, is more mountainous with less population than Rappahannock County “If they can do it,” he urged, “you can do it.”

Chair Donehey queried whether the Authority Board could do tow things at once: (1) Agree to be part of a regional coalition, AND (2) Review the three RFI submissions? This question evoked several more issues raised by the Authority Board members, including terms of All Points Broadband’s memorandum of understanding, Shentel coverage in southwest Rappahannock County under its RDOF grant and overlap of other ISPs with the areas All Points anticipated covering.

Mr. Whitson referenced declining time available at this meeting for the Board to consider these and related issues and moved to continue the Board meeting to Thursday, July 22, at 6:00 p.m. in the Rappahannock County Courthouse. Vice Chair Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Aye: Donehey, Smith, Parrish, Frazier, and Whitson.

Nay:

Abstain:

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Bond, Secretary