



MATHEWS BROADBAND ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

16 March 2021 9AM - 10AM on ZOOM

MINUTES

Present: Judy Rowe, Rob Quartel, Mindy Conner, Jeff Beekhoo, Greg Lewis, Michael Anthony, Corey Christensen, Nancy Welch, Joe Syslo, Amy Dubois, Hal Bourque, and Page Herbert.

OPENER: Judy Rowe opened the March 16, 2021 meeting with a greeting and a Digital Literacy Zoom Lesson (See attached virtual background.)

MINUTES: Minutes from the 2/16/21 and 3/2/21 BBAB Meetings were distributed by email. Judy asked if there are any corrections or additions. Rob Quartel made a motion to accept the February 16, 2021 Minutes as presented, and Greg Lewis seconded the motion. The motion carried. Mindy Conner made a motion to accept the March 2, 2021 Minutes as presented, Rob Quartel seconded the motion. The motion carried

OLD BUSINESS:

Updates:

Smart Poles: Jeff Beekhoo reported that all the polls are running, and he is still waiting on the decision on a timeframe of when the lights should be on. Bethel is being drilled Thursday and concrete poured, so it should be up and running by the end of the week.

Mass email (see attached email/flyer): Judy reported the mass email was held up as we awaited the completion of the Smart Pole at Bethel, but it is going out now. Nancy Welch's office has been helpful getting the printing done.

Timing on lights: Judy Rowe reported she contacted Sheriff Barrick, and he will be giving her a recommendation.

Signs: Dee Russell was not present, but Judy reported the signs are in the process of being made, the poles will be purchased, and Dee Russell has secured a team to put the signs up, hopefully over the next week.

MiFis To Go: Greg Lewis reported this is going smoothly. The units have been steadily moving, and the library has received lots of good feedback indicating it is helping the community. Greg shared a story of a individual visiting the area to help her ailing parents and was able to make use of the MiFi lending program and work remotely.

Towers: Jeff Beekhoo reported progress with the Bohannon and Rescue Squad building towers, and has a Thursday Zoom meeting with the reps from Verizon and FCI Towers. He is putting together a cost analysis of the two towers with fiber connection. If we move forward with FCI Towers building and supplementing the towers, that cost will be taken out of the overall plan. This will provide the group with an idea of the benefits of revenue streams coming back. FCI Towers is looking at getting Verizon to get some buy-in on the dead areas where the towers will be located. Judy reported the tour was conducted a couple days ago with representatives from the Rescue Squad and Fire Department at both sites.

VATI Grants: Jeff Beekhoo reported there has been not announcement yet on the VATI grant awards.

Other Old Business: Jeff requested to add to our agenda that he will have close-out package ready for submission to the Mindy Conner once the Bethel Smart Pole is completed for reconciliation of funding.

NEW BUSINESS:

Stakeholder Focus Groups:

Joe Syslo, Higher Ed – Joe reported he met with one group on Higher Education, has a meeting set for tonight, and another for tomorrow. The reason for three separate groups is to accommodate schedules. The groups consist of students, teachers, and deans in higher education. Group discussions include: what the current situation is, what problems they have, what they need to know, training, and what do you think about the future. Joe will provide us with a written report.

Amy Dubois, Work from Home - Judy reported that Amy met with the Work from Home group. Amy had internet issues and asked Corey Christensen to report. He stated each participant spoke from the aspect of working from home and their connectivity issues, and working for the Department of Defense and health care where security is a major factor. Ideas were shared about training or a site that provided information about how to access the different technology BBAB is offering. Corey said there was discussion about people moving here from the cities and needing broadband. The company he works for went to all virtual, and there is the likelihood that some companies will remain virtual, thus the need for reliable broadband. Starlink and the other satellite companies were brought up and the group wanted to know how that would factor into the plans and availability. Amy stated it was a great group and good meeting. The problems identified included availability and lack of providers; the need is security protocol, fast internet, and their voices heard so they are not left out (i.e. the Starlink satellite). For the future, the group wants lightning-fast broadband consistent with high quality, options across the county to meet and connect, feel like in the future everyone will be working from home, there will be high-tech jobs here to attract families, different options for students, and to help tourism, education, business, job opportunities, real estate values, and retain our population. Amy said the biggest epiphany for training is right now, “helping people set up their Wi-Fi network to leverage what they already have”.

Joe Syslo, Local Business – Rob reported a meeting was scheduled for tomorrow morning at 9:00, but will need to be rescheduled because Buzz cannot make that meeting.

ABB's Internet Assist Program (see attached flyer) On March 10, 2021, Judy Rowe, Nancy Welch, Tiffany Gordon, and Julie Kaylor met with Michael Downey from Atlantic Broadband, and he gave them a flyer on Atlantic Broadband's Internet Assist Program. This is a limited program for new customers only, but has the potential to help people access for 15 and 1 speed which is sufficient to help children attend school and meet their school requirements. Nancy and Tiffany are pushing out the information in the county. Nancy added that it was ironically Michael's wife (an educator) who told him about the program, and Mathews County Public Schools has pushed this flyer out to all schools and PowerSchool daily bulletin. Judy stated this information will go out to other county organizations: Meals on Wheels, Hands Across Mathews, churches, and anyone who can find people that the program can help.

FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program: Judy Rowe reported this is something that came out since December. This for people who already have service, those at risk of losing their service because of financial issues. This was driven by a congressional decision. The program offers up to a \$50 discount per month for broadband service, up to \$75 per month if the household is on tribal land, and one-time discount of up to \$100 on a computer or tablet for eligible households. Judy hopes to get this information out to people who need it.

Starlink: Hal Bourque reported the most recent article stated that Starlink has initiated tests using laser to communicate between satellites, and the tests were successful. It appears plans are to outfit the rest of the fleet with this technology to enable a competitive World Wide Web system. Hal has signed up for the service and is supposed to get it in a few months. Judy said Hal has been monitoring it for us. Hal said the cost is \$99 down-payment (refundable), an estimated monthly cost is \$100 for the service, \$499 for the equipment, and there is an app you download to show you how to set the system up yourself.

Digital Literacy: Judy heard from Page yesterday, and he reported the West Mathews Community League is talking about what they can do to help with our efforts with digital literacy. We currently have a Smart Pole there, and their senior citizens want to know how to access our service. Judy contacted Greg Lewis about setting up the digital literacy opportunity. Page said the group is very excited and appreciate any assistance we can provide. There is a meeting tomorrow night with guest speaker Paul Hudgins, County Supervisor, who lives in the west Mathews area. There is a list of about 120 residents who will be contacted. Once a time a date is established for the training, the calls will go out to the residents. Judy will attend the meeting tomorrow night to distribute the brochure on the Smart Poles and Atlantic Broadband Assist Program.

Other New Business:

Joe Syslo participated in the Lancaster Broadband Authority, at the request of Judy, to find out what was going with the authority as opposed to an advisory. Twice Joe attempted to attend their meetings, but they were closed-meetings, and he could not participate. Joe's plan was to find out what the requirements are for transitioning from an advisory to an authority, if their bylaws were different from ours and why, and what does their ledger look like, and is there a conflict with public service serving on the authority. Joe learned it is very easy to transition from an advisory to an authority, and the state laws allow for that and states that you should be an authority. The Bylaws would have to be adjusted somewhat, and the Virginia Wireless Services Party Act would need to be incorporated into the Bylaws. There is no ledger, just simply a checkbook, but Joe advised that there should be more stringent rules on accounts going in and out. There was absolutely no conflict of interest for public servants (county and state officials) serving on the authority. There are five directors (chair, vice chair, and three others not named). The secretary and treasurer are not necessarily directors. They are wrestling with forming committees and have advertised for hiring an executive director. Judy thanked Joe for his findings/report and agreed this is something the groups needs to look at. Jeff recommended the board fully consider transitioning to an authority, especially as we come to the next stage of planning, state funding will recommend that an authority be formed and a budget be put together.

ADJOURN: There being no further business, Joe Syslo made the motion to adjourn, and Rob Quartel seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

CALENDAR:

BOS Meeting: 23 MARCH 2021 6:00 PM
BAB Meeting: 6 APRIL 2021 9:00 AM ZOOM
BAB Meeting: 20 APRIL 2021 9:00 AM ZOOM
BOS Meeting: 30 APRIL 2021 6:00 PM