

QAC Broadband Advisory Committee meeting

May 21, 2020 4 – 6pm | Update on Broadband efforts and Feasibility Study Review

Attendees:

BAC/QAC

Megan DelGaudio
Mary Ellen Sheffield
Ed Cummins
Alison Davis
Dave MacGlashan
Joyce Jones
Adam Weinstein
Ben Schaffle
Scott Seaborne
Heather Tinelli

Public

Scott Randall
Cindy Strauss

Consultant

Ziggy Rivkin-Fish – CTC Technology

Will hold an Executive Session at the end of the meeting to discuss the \$700,000 received from the CARES Act.

4:03 pm Ben motioned to begin; Allison Seconded.

Megan - A restructuring at ABB has taken place and those at the executive level that the County had a relationship with are no longer there – Scott Randall and Bernard Hazelwood. Scott has proposed project management for CARES Act funding that we will discuss prior to closed session.

CARES ACT – for Covid-19 expenses for healthcare and business recovery and also extends to broadband. County got \$8.8 million. Megan reached out to Think Big, Talkie, and ABB for possible projects and put a list together of projects for the County Administrator. Talkie provided 4 projects, Think Big 2 projects and we only discussed the Colby/Willow Branch with ABB but had their cost proposals for several mapped areas of the County to review against other proposals.

County Admin – Asked for \$3.1 million for broadband which included \$160K for hotspot placement in areas that have existing ABB service with aerial lines; \$700,000 was approved. Part of the proposal. The Committee needs to agree on where those funds will be best used and make a recommendation to the Commissioners. Money must be spent, and projects completed by December 30th. Fiber not available for many weeks due to being made in China.

Joyce – **Budget meeting** – \$500k that was proposed for public broadband for FY21 was cut. This will not allow us to apply any money for grants. 021 budget – has not been voted on yet.

Megan suggest that BAC writes a letter to CC to see if the \$500k can be left in the budget. June 2nd next meeting – have letter prepared by then and sign up to speak at the meeting. Alison will draft the letter. Need to have to CC by next Tuesday or Wednesday – 26th or 27th.

Ziggy – Broadband Study Update:

For the most part the study was well done. Maybe some areas that they say are not covered that are.

Figure 9: is confusing everything is green and looks like everything is served.

Pg. 48 – Towers – Considered that are not built yet have been shown as built – Megan will provide Ziggy with the info on the 2 new towers that were built and 6 more that are “Approved not built”.

Question about the Grant info – State Grant for \$1-3 million on pg. 57 awardees jurisdictions will not be eligible for any grants until completion – or 2 more years. Ziggy will check into.

Megan – question about telemedicine USDA grant. Ziggy explained – distance learning – targeted towards patients with IOT devices that require internet connections. More for a quick solution – fixed wireless setup for a diabetes patient - not super relevant for our broadband initiative. The other part of the grant is for distance teaching and learning. hospital, medical school that provides services – video link for classes to rural areas another hospital – Entities apply for not the County. Keep on the radar due to Public Health side.

Days ago: \$1.5 billion added by Congress for Economic Dev Authority – used money from Natural Disasters fund to go to Covid – this only requires 20% match and many requirements have been loosened. Opportunity however it’s still for Econ Dev Department. Any idea of a project – reach out to rep in Philadelphia – USDA. Have to start with them.

Blog on CTC website – he will direct us to where to find it. EAAEDA Grant – planning type projects.

Adam – who in QAC writes these grants? Does CTC write grants for people? No one in the County is designated to write grants. Megan asked if Ziggy’s group writes grants.

Ziggy - Yes, working with Garret County in Maryland. Need letters of support from business leaders; Agri-business would work well because farmers need to have access. What to target – broadband sweet spot between \$3 and 5 million – application for EDA grant due in before the end of July.

If comfortable with Study – get in CC for the June 9th meeting. That way they have it before we go after money in July. All comments and a letter sent by June 3rd.

We will give Ziggy the changes on the report by Wednesday, 5/27 at Noon and a letter by that day for budget comments. Allison will get out to everyone this weekend for comments.

Megan needs to check the agenda to see if we can fit on. Ziggy will be available.

Cindy – citizen – asked if North County is included in study – large section between Church Hill and Centreville. Offered her services for marketing and getting word out so others will attend meetings etc.

Scott Randall – another County had suggested they could use his help with keeping things on track for Covid-19 money. A lot of money needs to be spent quickly; project management; reporting to State and Fed happens accurately and on time. He proposed to act as a consultant to help with our projects.

Executive Session – 4:43pm

Motion – Joyce motioned Allison seconded to go into Executive Session

Joyce – motion to leave Executive Session – Ben seconded 5:05 pm.

Ben announced that the decision made in the closed session was to support the expansion of Broadband in the Northern area in Sudlersville with Think Big as the provider.

Another plan for COVID funds for broadband are to go towards towards hotspots - \$3000.00 to purchase and install. Parks/libraries – 800 ft is the average coverage area. \$160K was requested for this. Will also need to be in by December 30th as well. Only where ABB have aerial available currently. Schools put in their own wifi as a separate project.

By August 13th Choptank needs to have 7000 voters approve the move forward to provide broadband by and according to the Bay times may start lighting customers up in the Spring of 2021. According to Ziggy they have to submit their short form application by July 15th for the RDOF grant. Oct 27 or 29th?

Ben motioned to adjourn and Allison 2nd to end 5:23pm