

Carter County Commission



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Minutes of:

Health & Welfare Committee Zoom Meeting

September 1, 2020 6:00 PM

Members:

Chairman Dr. Robert Acuff - present

Mike Hill - present

Brad Johnson - present

Austin Jaynes - present

Ginger Holdren - present

Randall Jenkins - present

Sonja Culler in for Ray Lyons

Robin McKamey - present

I. Call to Order

The Health & Welfare Committee was called to order by Dr. Robert Acuff at 6:05 pm.

II. Roll Call

All members present except for Ray Lyons. Chairman Acuff asked for a motion to have Sonja Culler sit in for Ray Lyons. A motion was made by Brad Johnson, second by Robin McKamey.

Roll Call

Randall Jenkins – yes

Mike Hill – yes

Robert Acuff – yes

Brad Johnson – yes

Austin Jaynes – yes

Ginger Holdren – yes

Sonja Culler – yes

Robin McKamey – yes

All in favor. Motion unanimously approved.

Commissioner Sonja Culler will sit in for Commissioner Lyons.

III. Approval of Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Mike Hill, second by Robin McKamey.

Roll Call

Randall Jenkins – yes

Mike Hill – yes

Robert Acuff – yes

Brad Johnson – yes

Austin Jaynes – yes

Ginger Holdren – yes

Sonja Culler – yes

Robin McKamey – yes

All in favor. Motion unanimously approved.

IV. Public Comments

None

V. Broadband Internet Discussion

Commissioner Mike Hill met with Mountain Electric and they showed no interest in broadband internet. They explained that it would cost upward of \$60 million dollars to upgrade the system they have to carry it. During his talks with Skybest he explained that the schools in the system could possibly be a hub for the outlying areas. They showed interest in the project. Chairman Acuff spoke with Danny McClain about the schools being a hub for Skybest and he showed informed him that he would be interested. Ken Rea with the Tennessee Development Agency praised the committee for doing all the work that will need to be done. The things that are being done now are usually done later in the planning stages of the project. Chairman Acuff stated that while there are some grants still to be awarded the county did not receive any of the emergency funds that have already been awarded.

Mayor Barnett informed the committee that he spoke to Governor Lees office and expressed his disappointment in not receiving any of the grant money. Gov. Lees office expressed their desire to help in any way they can to see that broadband is made available.

Brad Johnson suggested that the committee is going to have to design and set up programs to get the money. There are 9 elementary schools so there should be 9 different projects. Chairman Acuff informed that he believed that the county was going to have to put some of the matching money on the table. Ginger Holdren asked if the committee needed to have that discussion tonight? If we must have money on the table then we will only be meeting one more time before the deadline. Mike Hill stated that we need to discuss broadband loans, they are easier to get if grant 50% is not available.

Mr. Hill asked Mayor Barnett about the survey that the Star ran in the paper, has there been any reply? There has been no reply to date. Mr. Hill said he sent around the Survey Monkey data that he has received. Mr. Rae asked Mr. Hill if that data can be used to identify where service is needed. Mr. Hill replied that everyone pretty much knows where the pockets are. Mr. Rae stated that he can take the data and map it so it would be helpful for Skybest. Mr. Johnson asked what the cost would be to do a survey at car registration or the election commission? Mr. Hill informed him that if we do a mail out survey it would cost about \$30,000 to hit all 56,000 residents of the county. Mr. Johnson reminded the committee that we would not need to send to the entire county, just the ones in the target areas that do not have internet. If we only sent it out to the areas that we know do not have service, it would be more efficient. Mr. Hill stated that if you sent to 14,000 residents, it would cost about \$1540 in postage. Chairman Acuff expressed interest but is concerned that there may not be time to get this done before the deadline. Several ideas were discussed as ways to get the surveys to the homes and back. Some of those being Roadblocks, handing them out at the schools in the pickup lines, US census workers, the school's telephone automated system, social media. Mr. Jenkins asked if the teachers could help by sending out the survey with the students. Patty Woodby stated that the registration paperwork for the schools included the question "Do you have internet at your home", so the schools have that information, if they can get it to us without us knowing personal information. Chairman Acuff asked Abby Frye if she can spend money to advertise on Facebook? She replied yes, the money is in the advertising budget, she will get with Brad Burke about getting it done.

Chairman Acuff informed the committee that he would get with the superintendent of schools and see if he could discuss it with his teachers during his scheduled meetings. Mr. Hill informed the committee that he got a call from Mr. McClain asking if he had received the information yet, so he believes that the information the school has will be forthcoming. Abby Frye told the committee that the Elizabethton Star has emails that they send out to advertise, maybe a link to the survey could be sent.

Ms. Holdren stated that she would like to have money on the table to help with these grants. Her original thought was to ask for \$200,000 and that would be 10% of what we were hoping to obtain. But, because there is potential to get \$2million in more than one place, I think it should be \$100,000 per awarded area. And is this broadband something we can use the funds from the state for. Mr. Jaynes stated that the county has \$1.3 million in funds from the state for Covid relief, \$800,000 of it has had the restrictions removed, we should ask Brad Burke if this can be used for this project? Mr. Hill stated that the grants are usually a 50/50 split and the service provider typically puts up 50% out of their accounts. We would probably want to find the carrier and see what they would be willing to put up. Also,

broadband loans are pretty easy to get. Chairman Acuff stated that they could put \$5/600,000 in reserve and if it is not needed it can be returned.

Mike Hill made a motion, second by Ginger Holdren to ask the Budget Committee for \$500,000 contingent on securing the grant money. With the understanding that it goes back into the budget if grants are not obtained. Sonja Culler asked Mr. Hill and Ms. Holdren if they would amend the motion to say \$600,000 (3 areas of concern, \$200,000 each). Mr. Hill and Ms. Holdren accept the amendment.

Roll Call

Randall Jenkins – yes

Mike Hill – yes

Robert Acuff – yes

Brad Johnson – yes

Austin Jaynes – yes

Ginger Holdren – yes

Sonja Culler – yes

Robin McKamey – yes

All in favor. Motion unanimously approved.

VI. Old / New Business

None

VII. Adjournment

Chairman Acuff asked the committee if they should adjourn or recess to a later date.

A motion was made by Ginger Holdren, second by Mike Hill to recess until September 10, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

Roll Call

Randall Jenkins – yes

Mike Hill – yes

Robert Acuff – yes

Brad Johnson – yes

Austin Jaynes – yes

Ginger Holdren – yes

Sonja Culler – yes

Robin McKamey – yes

All in favor. Motion unanimously approved.

The Health & Welfare Committee was recessed and will reconvene via Zoom on September 10, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by

Gwen Crowe