

ORIGINAL

**WEAKLEY COUNTY, TENNESSEE
FIBER RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING**

Tuesday, November 9, 2020 – 6:00 PM – Dresden Elementary School, Dresden, TN

Fiber Research Committee Members Present: Commissioners David Bell, Gary Eddings, Roger Donaldson, Dennis Doster, and County Mayor Jake Bynum

Fiber Research Committee Members Absent: None

The Weakley County Fiber Research Committee met on Tuesday, November 9, 2020, at 6:00 PM in the Dresden Middle School Gymnasium in Dresden, TN. Others present included special speakers, city and county officials, commissioners, representatives from WK&T Telecommunications Cooperative, many citizens from across Weakley County, and representatives from the media.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Bell called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and provided a welcome and introduction to the subject of the meeting.

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. INTRODUCTION AND REPORT

He recognized Commissioner Doster who provided a few statistics regarding fiber and reframed the need of the fiber high-speed access to the homes of every Weakley Countian. He spoke on the importance of the project and explained how fiber is the best and most appropriate infrastructure for obtaining high-speed internet to the homes across the county.

B. INTRODUCTION OF REPRESENTATIVE SPEAKERS

Chairperson Bell introduced the speakers for the evening.

1. Randy Frazier, Director of Schools

Director of Schools Frazier explained how the lack of high speed internet relative to the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected the children of Weakley County and the school system on a whole. He said that the impacts would be seen for many years to come. He talked about the importance of the project but expressed his concern for the families who were economically disadvantaged and who would not be able to afford such a service if it were offered. He said that he hoped that solutions would be studied for those issues.

2. Steve Vantrease, Chairman, Weakley County School Board

Chairman Vantrease said that access to the internet is a basic need for children today, such as electricity and running water. He said that children in our county should have access to the internet when they get home just as they have it when they are at school. He said he believed that the fiber framework is a reliable infrastructure that he fully supports.

3. Shelby Spurgeon, Weakley County Economic Development Director

Director Spurgeon said that where fiber relates to economic development, we want our communities to grow and thrive in lieu of decline. She provided an example to compare the building of the fiber network in our county to providing an Interstate 40 access point in our county. She said that economic development representatives across the state agree that high speed internet is essential infrastructure now, just like water, sewer, and roads. She said that for our community to compare and land projects, we must be able to compete – and fiber is a critical piece to the puzzle.

4. David Sudberry, President Elect, Reelfoot Regional Association of Realtors

Mr. Sudberry explained situations and scenarios when his livelihood and business was negatively affected by the lack of fiber internet in the county. He went on to speak to the importance of it relative to his business at present and in the future.

5. Dr. Nassar Nassar, President and CEO, Savant Learning Systems Inc.

Dr. Nassar additionally spoke to the importance of fiber internet for his business that is situated in downtown Martin. He went on to say that COVID-19 affected his business during the shutdown, when his employees who lived in remote areas could not work from home with success.

6. Dr. Keith Carver, Chancellor, The University of Tennessee at Martin

Dr. Carver spoke to how important high speed internet access is for attracting students as well as faculty and staff to UT Martin. He explained how the lack of adequate internet access was the number one challenge for the university during the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown. He relayed that UT Martin had to purchase hundreds of wifi hot spots and delivered them to students who live in rural areas of West Tennessee to help accommodate them when UTM went virtual during the pandemic.

C. QUESTIONS FROM COMMISSIONERS & CITIZENS

Chairperson Bell recognized many citizens who voiced concerns and expressed the limitations that their families experience as a result of low or no internet speeds. Citizens voiced concerns that included limitations to health care, home based businesses, real estate prospects, teaching children from home, and many more concerns. Dresden City Mayor Washburn explained the benefits that fiber had brought to Dresden and debunked some myths regarding satellite internet. Citizens provided valuable input and advocated in support of moving the fiber project forward.

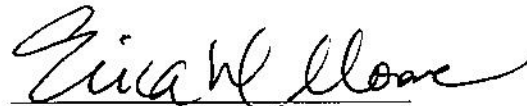
D. RESOLUTION NO. 2021-22:

This resolution authorizes the complete build of a fiber internet infrastructure network throughout the unincorporated areas of Weakley County, Tennessee. Mayor Bynum made the motion to recommend the resolution to the full county commission and with a second by Commissioner Doster, the motion passed unanimously.

III. - IV. OTHER BUSINESS AND ADJOURN


Having no other business, Commissioner Doster made the motion to adjourn, and with a second by Commissioner Eddings, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Erica Moore, Secretary
Fiber Research Committee

Approved:


David Bell, Chairperson
Fiber Research Committee

Date: 3-1-21