

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

Tuesday, May 11, 2021 – 8:30 AM – Conference Room, Board of Education, Dresden, TN

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

Fiber Research Committee Members Absent: None

The Weakley County Fiber Research Committee met on Tuesday, May 11, 2021, at 8:30 AM in the conference room at the Board of Education in Dresden. Others present included Director of Finance John Liggett, Director of Schools Randy Frazier, Joshua Thompson, Commissioner Beth VanCleave, WK&T representative Stacy Riley and two representatives of the media.

I.-II. CALL TO ORDER – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairperson Bell called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. Commissioner Doster made the motion to approve the minutes of the meetings held on March 1, 2021. With a second by Commissioner Donaldson, the motion to approve passed unanimously.

III. OLD BUSINESS

None

IV. NEW BUSINESS

a. Election of Recording Secretary- Commissioner Bell called for a recommendation for the Fiber Research Recording Secretary. Commissioner Doster made a motion for Kirsty-Rhe Janse to serve as the new recording secretary. With no other recommendations and a second from Commissioner Donaldson, Kirsty-Rhe Janse was unanimously appointed as recording secretary.

b. Report from West Kentucky and Tennessee Telecommunication on Phase 1 and Phase 2- Commissioner Bell recognized WK&T Representative Stacy Riley to discuss phase 1 and phase 2 with the committee.

Two grants were received and has allowed for WK&T to serve more residents. Materials are still needed for some of the areas in phase one but the timeframe is between October and November to be done with the South Martin area, with the deadline being in April of next year.

The Palmersville area has a two year grant and it is just getting started. Commissioner Bell asked for clarification on whether the map is within the city limits of Palmersville or if it is the surrounding area that will be served. The problem is that there is a section of Palmersville that is being cut out and cant be served. The grant will not allow for that area to be served. Representative Riley showed the committee the map that they are using and where exactly the lines are falling. He showed them which areas will not be served due to the lines they were forced to draw for the grant. Representative Riley mentioned a community connect grant that Weakley County could apply for, where a temporary community center would be set up and give the community Wi-Fi. There are federal funds that the county could still possibly get but just have not received.

Commissioner Bell mentioned that the state of Tennessee has incorporated a monetary incentive for people to verify if they are being served or not.

According to Mr. Riley ribbon fiber is a year out, due to the inability to get the materials. Fiber is in high demand as of right now, and it is causing a high demand for the materials. If the materials don't come in, the timeline will changed and be pushed back. Mr. Riley does not foresee any problems, although it could happen.

Future grants that are available include the TN grant, and the Federal reconnect is in the works, however they will have to change it to 25-3 if they still hold 10-1 it won't happen.

Commissioner Doster wanted to know what the feedback has been since starting phase 1. Commissioners Donaldson and Eddings have spoken to several people in their districts and they have been receiving good feedback from people happy about the service.

Phase three includes the remainder of the county. Commissioner Bell recognized Mayor Bynum, who spoke about the process for phase three. Essentially the county will receive just under \$6.5 million from the American Rescue Plan. Half of that money is set to come in later that day or the next day, whereas the other half should be set to come in around the same time in 2022. That money can specifically be used for broadband, and that's where 25-3 was picked up. That money could potentially go towards any area that is below 25-3. Mayor Bynum discussed the audit finding that was discovered by the comptroller's office. What the county considers a service contract, the comptroller's office viewed it as a debt. No money was borrowed and an appropriation would be required each year but it was still viewed as a debt, which means the county has to reserve for that money. There was nothing wrong with the agreement it was just that the money would have to be reserved. There is no other way to fix the audit finding but to reserve the money. Fortunately with the money the county is receiving, it can be reserved and it will take care of the \$4 million for phase 1 and 2. That still leaves some money over for the commission to do with as they see fit. With the federal money, it has to be off of the books by end of fiscal year 2024, which could mean there is a potential for a contract change. The money that the county is getting is not reimbursable, the county has to meet the right qualifications otherwise the money has to be paid back.

Downtown Palmersville does not meet the qualifications of the state or federal grant. Without the investment of Weakley County and WK&T that area is never going to be served. Remapping may help with the issue but there are still areas that will never qualify for grant funding. Without a vehicle where funds don't have to be reserved the county will be challenged to put away \$5 million. The federal money took care of the current issue but it does not help the last phase. The money that is received will have to go into a different fund and account until it is used.

No contractually changes has been made with WK&T, however the annual payment for that service will have to be changed. The need is being seen and there are several service providers that are now interested due to the funds that came in. However there is no reason to step away from WK&T, they have been with the county since the beginning and have been loyal.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Bell addressed the Ardolf Charter and how the timeframe is currently a concern. The money from it is very slow. It is a nationwide bidding process and because of this there could be a two year wait before anything gets put into action. The current mobile service provider is in the air, and this has caused problems that would not have been there if it were in the ground.

VI. ADJOURN

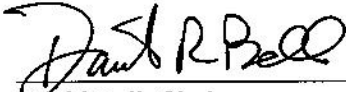
Having no other business, Commissioner Doster made the motion to adjourn, and with a second by Commissioner Bell, the meeting was adjourned at 9:23 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kirsty Rhe Janse, Secretary
Fiber Research Committee

Approved:



David Bell, Chairperson
Fiber Research Committee

Date: 7-21-21