

**WEAKLEY COUNTY, TENNESSEE
FIBER COMMITTEE**

Monday, February 13, 2023 – 9:00 A.M. – Weakley County Courthouse, Dresden, TN

Fiber Committee Members Present: Mayor Jake Bynum, Commissioners David Bell, Wade Cook, Roger Donaldson, Dennis Doster, Gary Eddings, David Hawks, Billy Hazlewood

Fiber Committee Members Absent: None

I. CALL TO ORDER – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairperson Bell called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and called for the consideration of the minutes from the meeting that was held on October 20, 2022. Commissioner Donaldson made the motion to approve, and with a second by Commissioner Doster, the motion passed unanimously.

II. OLD BUSINESS

III. NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of current grant progress:

Chairperson Bell asked the representatives from WK&T to provide an update on the progress from Phase I. The representatives confirmed that Phase I has been completed. Chairperson Bell asked if a Community Access Point had been identified. The WK&T representatives stated that it is the County's role to figure out where to locate those community access points. Commissioner Eddings asked if, for example, the Sidonia Fire Department wanted to serve as a community access point, who would pay for the installation fee in that instance? Mayor Bynum stated that the Fire Department would pay for the service since they would have access to the service, but that they would just make it accessible to citizens in the parking lot. Another idea for a potential community access point is the church on New Home Road.

Chairperson Bell asked the representatives from WK&T to provide an update on the progress from Phase II. The representatives answered that they are currently working through some challenges but predicted all of Phase II would be released by the end of the following week. Commissioner Bell asked if WK&T is making an effort to communicate that this area is now available for hookup, to which the representatives confirmed. Commissioner Bell went on to state the need for the Palmersville Fire Department to receive service and asked how to go about getting that expedited. Mayor Bynum stated that part of the issue is that we wouldn't want to provide someone's access outside of Phase II since Phase II is not complete yet. The other challenge is that the County has stated that a Community Access Point would not be identified until Phase II is completed since that would begin the need for the release of funds from the County. Commissioner Bell asked Commissioner Doster to brainstorm other ideas for community access points within Phase II. Commissioner Eddings also pointed out that in order to try to sell this idea to potential access points we will need to know how much the service will cost these access points.

Chairperson Bell asked the representatives from WK&T to provide an update on the progress from Phase III. The representatives stated that all Phase III construction has been completed and that splicing has been the biggest holdup. He is hopeful that as they get the splicing complete, they can hook people up as they go along, which might be able to begin happening as early as one to two months from now. Commissioner Bell commented that the count had not promised any funds to go toward Phase III. The representatives from WK&T stated that they would like to request the County help with the pay for the worker that would need to be at the Community Connect Site. Commissioner Bell informed them that

they would need to come to the committee with a formal request if they would like assistance with paying this person's salary.

Chairperson Bell went on to ask about the Across the Road Project for Phase I and asked for an update. The representatives informed the committee that they believe there are roughly 230 people which will be eligible for hookup after Phase II is complete (they lumped Phase I and Phase II across the road residences together in that number). Mayor Bynum stated that probably the best way to keep up with the financial side of this across the road project would be for WK&T to invoice the County quarterly for the hookups they've performed. WK&T stated that once funds are promised via a resolution passed through Finance, Ways and Means, they can begin hookups for the across the road category almost immediately. Commissioner Bell stated that this committee could make the recommendation for that appropriation to Finance, Ways, and Means. Commissioner Eddings made a motion to appropriate \$50,000 for the Across the Road Project which would address residences that fall across from Phases I, II, and III. Commissioner Hazlewood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Commissioner Bell stated that it would be March before there is a full commission meeting, so it would be March at the earliest that we would have a direction on this. Mayor Bynum informed the committee that there were additional monies available that were unexpected, and these should cover the \$50,000.

Chairperson Bell asked the representatives from WK&T to provide an update on the progress from Phase IV. This was the largest build to date at 371 miles. The representatives informed the committee that this phase is still in its infancy. Engineering has begun on it, but the state has not sent contracts out to any of the awardees, so they cannot officially begin until that happens. Commissioner Donaldson stated that he has had some frustration with trying to inform his constituents of who will and won't be included in this phase. WK&T stated that they are unable to confirm specifics since the state is who approves the addresses of the areas WK&T applied for in the grant application. They stated that the problem with releasing this information too early is that the information is inaccurate at this point, especially regarding the boundary lines. Commissioner Donaldson expressed further frustration with the fact that he expected to have this information a month previously. WK&T said that they understood, and that the State was working through it as quickly as possible, but that there were additional funds added to the pot which has slowed things down.

Chairperson Bell asked the representatives if, hypothetically, citizens who fall outside of a previous grant phase, but are ineligible for Across the Road, could request installation if they paid for the cost themselves. He gave an example of three residences a mile and a half away from a previous phase agreeing to cover the cost. The representatives from WK&T stated that this is possible, hypothetically, but very costly to the citizen as this example alone could cost as much as \$45-50,000. The representatives went on to explain that the reality of the situation is this – WK&T and the county could decide to partner today and complete the remaining areas of the county for around \$8M total, however, the wisest thing to do is what has been done thus far which is to wait on grant funding from the state to be released which is being done slowly but surely. Commissioner Donaldson confirmed that a new round of grant funding is set to be released this year and stated that he was hopeful we would be awarded this grant as well. He said that he was of the understanding this grant would be of a substantial amount.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

V. ADJOURN

Having no other business, Commissioner Hawks adjourned the meeting at 9:54 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Lauren Rush, Secretary

Fiber Committee

Approved:



David Bell, Chairperson

Fiber Committee

Date: 11-1-23