

BROADBAND ADVISORY COUNCIL
November 13, 2020
APPROVED MINUTES
2:00 PM
Digital Meeting via Google Meets

Members Present

The Honorable Brian Ball (Proxy by Evan Feinman)
Senator Jennifer Boysko, Chair
James Carr
Mike Culp
Senator Ghazala Hashmi
Kristie Helmick Proctor
Delegate Chris Hurst
Mike Keyser
Delegate Paul E. Krizek
Ray LaMura
Delegate James A. Leftwich, Jr.
Senator Lynwood W. Lewis, Jr.
Steve Sandy
Richard Schollman
The Honorable Bettina K. Ring
Delegate Roslyn C. Tyler, Vice Chair

Members Absent

Senator Lynwood W. Lewis

Call to Order

Senator Jennifer Boysko, Chair of the Broadband Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

Mr. Chandler Vaughan, Policy Analyst for the Office of Broadband at the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), announced that due to the Governor's Declared State of Emergency due to COVID-19, it is impracticable and unsafe for the Broadband Advisory Council to assemble in a single location, so the council meeting will be held electronically, by video conference and telephone options, pursuant to 2020 Amendments to the 2020 Appropriation Act. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the Broadband Advisory Council and the discharge of its lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities. The public is welcome to use the link and phone number options made available by staff to attend the meeting electronically. The Broadband Advisory Council will make available a recording or transcript of the meeting on its website in accordance with the timeframes established in Sections 2.2-3707 and 2.2-

3701.1 of the Code of Virginia.

- Roll Call Mr. Vaughan called the roll and stated that a quorum was present.
- Approval of Minutes A motion was made by Mr. Feinman and properly seconded by Mr. Krizek to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2020 meeting of the Broadband Advisory Council. The motion passed (Yea: Boysko, Carr, Culp, Feinman, Helmick Proctor, Hurst, Keyser, Krizek, LaMura, Sandy, Shollman, Ring, Tyler; Nay: None)
- Virginia Telecommunications Initiative Budget Overview (VATI) Dr. Tamarah Holmes, Director of the Office of Broadband at DHCD provided the Council with an update on the VATI application process. She noted that 45 applications representing 53 different localities were submitted for a combined amount of \$105M. The VATI team is working with applicants to determine the validity of 14 challenges to applications and is also working to re-scope projects with valid challenges.
- Budget Discussion Mr. Erik Johnston, Director of DHCD and Mr. Feinman provided an overview of budget language directing the Broadband Advisory Council to evaluate a possible policy change to allow public broadband authorities to apply directly for VATI funds without investment from the private sector.
- Presentations Mike Culp, Frank Smith, and Jason Grey provided overviews of the services provided and future broadband plans of Albemarle Broadband Authority, Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, and Danville Utilities, respectively.

Public Comment Period

Dawn Meyer, Executive Director of the Loudoun Education Foundation, spoke in support of the BAC evaluating any possible flexibilities that the VATI program may be able to utilize in order to bridge the digital divide for the sake of limiting disparities in educational opportunities statewide.

Michael McEvoy, Chair of the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, spoke in support of expanding broadband coverage as well as addressing affordability problems for broadband access.

Mr. Vaughan read a letter addressed to the Council from Steve Trivett, Mayor of Ashland, in support of revisions to the VATI program that would allow greater return on investment for taxpayers.

Kevin McNulty spoke on behalf of Cox Communications to explain steps Cox Communications is taking in Roanoke to help combat access and affordability issues.

Ray LaMura stated the importance and success of VATI's efforts to expand access to broadband.

Sherri Neil spoke on behalf of Portsmouth in support of VATI program revisions that would allow municipal authorities to apply for funding.

Jennifer Eddy, speaking on behalf of herself, spoke in support of evaluating any and all options that would help to bolster broadband access across the state as quickly as possible.

Councilmember
Comments

Evan Feinman spoke to clarify the division of thinking on the access versus affordability issues presented in broadband expansions. Mr. Feinman stated VATI is designed to address the access problem, not the affordability program.

Mike Keyser noted the upcoming Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction (RDOF) and asked staff if this upcoming auction presented implications to allowing public broadband authorities to directly apply for VATI funding. Mr. Feinman stated the complexity the RDOF auction adds to broadband expansion efforts, but reinstated the difference between federal and state broadband funding sources, noting the nature of each.

Delegate Hurst called for the Broadband Advisory Council to define underserved in regards to broadband access to guide discussions around broadband access and broadband affordability.

Delegate Krizek provided suggestions for agenda items at the December meeting, including: an evaluation of provider models, an evaluation of the cost-benefit analysis, an overview of the progress VATI has made and study of failures VATI has experienced.

Ray LaMura stated his favor for maintaining VATI's focus on the unserved populations around Virginia.

Delegate Roslyn Tyler reinforced comments from Mr. LaMura, stating large unserved areas exist in her district in Southside Virginia and the focus for VATI should remain on providing access to unserved areas.

Delegate Tyler asked if a statewide mapping tool was available to identify unserved areas. Dr. Holmes stated DHCD staff are working with Virginia Tech to update the broadband mapping tool to provide a more user friendly experience and provide VATI applicants a way to identify unserved areas in their communities.

Jimmy Carr requested staff provide financial information of public broadband authorities prior to the December meeting of the Broadband Advisory Council to inform discussion.

Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned.