

**THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE COUNTY OF CRAVEN MET IN SPECIAL SESSION IN THE COMMISSIONERS' ROOM OF THE CRAVEN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, 406 CRAVEN STREET, NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA AT 10:00 AM ON MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2022. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO DISCUSS BROADBAND.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Chairman Jason R. Jones  
Commissioner George S. Liner  
Commissioner Thomas F. Mark  
Commissioner Theron L. McCabe  
Commissioner E.T. Mitchell

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Vice-Chairman Denny Bucher  
Commissioner Beatrice R. Smith

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Jack B. Veit, III, County Manager  
Gene Hodges, Assistant County Manager  
Craig Warren, Finance Director  
Amber Parker, Human Resources Director  
Arey Grady, County Attorney  
Lauren Wargo, Assistant to the County Manager  
Nan Holton, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Jones recognized the following guests with Leadership Craven: Wendy White, John Finlayson and Toby Fabrizio. He also recognized Scott Murphy.

Mr. Jones explained the Special Called meeting was to discuss broadband, as it has been a desire of this Board to provide reliable internet across the County. He indicated Commissioners Bucher and Smith, although absent, had stated they are in support of efforts to improve connectivity across the County.

County Manager, Jack Veit, stated the number one issue this Board has faced is availability of internet throughout the County, especially in rural areas. He reported it was particularly noticeable after Hurricane Florence, but extremely problematic during the pandemic.

Mr. Veit explained that the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) grant is a State of North Carolina funded program with federal dollars for private sector broadband providers to deploy broadband services to unserved areas. He also highlighted a federal grant program known as the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). Federal RDOF was created by the FCC to auction off rural census blocks and utilize federal dollars to expand broadband service.

Mr. Veit outlined the GREAT Grant details as follows:

- Applications due May 4, 2022
- Applicants can only be broadband providers
- Grants used to build infrastructure to last mile, unserved locations (<25/3 Mbps)
- Maximum Grant award is \$4 million
- Up to two awards per County possible
- Projects have to be in "eligible economically distressed counties" (Tier 1 & Tier 2).

Using a link to NC One Map Data, he highlighted the eligible areas within Craven County, inclusive of Cove City, Ft. Barnwell, Vanceboro, and Harlowe areas. Challenges in the Harlowe area are related to data problems based on how the FCC defines service. Using data collected on total households in the three high school attendance districts Mr. Veit illustrated why this is so important, highlighting 54.41% of West Craven High School households are without reliable internet. He emphasized the County's concern is with quantity of internet and the ability to do school. Serving the most eastern, northern, and western parts of Craven County are the areas in the most need of internet service.

Assistant County Manager, Gene Hodges, added that GREAT Grant monies cannot be used to provide service in RDOF defined areas, which is why when looking at the maps provided it seemed rather hop scotched. The Great Grant has a two-year window of receiving funds to getting fiber to the house. The RDOF program has a four year build out window.

Mr. Veit reviewed the three proposals submitted to Craven County on behalf of Suddenlink/Altice, CenturyLink/Lumen/BrightSpeed, and Charter/Spectrum. Maps were provided to illustrate the service areas to be addressed by each proposal.

## **GRANT PROPOSALS**

### **Suddenlink/Altice Proposal**

- ❖ Expansion of existing network, mainly the western and northern parts of Craven County
- ❖ Reach approximately 753 homes/businesses
- ❖ Total project cost: \$4,515,509
- ❖ Requested County match: \$250,000

### **CenturyLink / Lumen / BrightSpeed Proposals (3 Options)**

#### **Option 1**

- ❖ New fiber line 5,500 homes
- ❖ Greater build out Hwy. 101, Adams Creek, while also targeting western and northern areas
- ❖ Total project cost: \$9.2 million
- ❖ Requested County match: \$500,000

#### **Option 2**

- ❖ Larger buildout to target 6,500 homes
- ❖ Greater build out in eastern County areas, and expanded build outs in eastern and northern
- ❖ Total project cost: \$13.15 million
- ❖ Requested County match: \$1.5 million

#### **Option 3**

- ❖ Full build out in eastern Craven County and further up Hwy. 17 to Beaufort County line
- ❖ Fiber lines to 7,200 homes
- ❖ Total project cost: \$16.86 million
- ❖ Requested County match: \$3.5 million

In response to inquiries about higher costs, the Board was reminded that CenturyLink is currently not in the broadband business right now, and this is their entry, requiring more infrastructure.

### **Charter / Spectrum Proposal**

- ❖ RDOF Households – 1,642
- ❖ GREAT Households – 1,255
- ❖ Total Households – 2,897
- ❖ Total project cost: \$6,015,088
- ❖ Requested County match: \$150,000

The Board engaged in discussions about costs, types of infrastructure, sustaining growth, and the internet being a critical utility.

The Board was reminded that there is no guarantee that any of the applications will get funded; and that the County cannot vouch for the service as we are not the service providers. The County's goal would be to provide households with access to service they do not currently have now. Mr. Veit also stated as many applications as desired can be submitted, but only two could be awarded and they each have a cap of \$4 million. He also emphasized that American Rescue Plan monies must be used to fund the County's match.

Commissioner Liner motioned to submit letters of support for the following proposals: Suddenlink / Altice with a \$250,000 match, CenturyLink's Option 1 with a \$500,000 match, and

Charter/Spectrum with \$150,000 match. His motion was seconded by Commissioner Mitchell and approved in a 5-0 roll call vote.

It was requested that local Legislators be updated on this and to have a Press Release. There was more discussion regarding less focus being on the eastern part of the County due to the obstacles in that area.

At 10:57 am Commissioner Mitchell motioned to adjourn. Her motion was seconded by Commissioner Liner and approved unanimously.

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Jason R. Jones  
Craven County Board of Commissioners

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Nan Holton  
Clerk to the Board