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**Bath-Highland Network Authority  
Virtual Meeting via Zoom  
Monday, October 19, 2020, at 1pm**

Authority Members in attendance:	Organization
David Blanchard	Highland County
Nancy Witschey	Highland County
Ronald Wimer	Town of Monterey
Others in attendance:	Organization
Robert Huff	MGW
Mike Bollinger	The Recorder
Morgan Messer	SVEC
Hunter Moore	CSPDC

**Call to Order**

Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in Virginia on March 12, 2020, in response to COVID-19. In light of this emergency, the October 19, 2020 meeting was conducted via Zoom Video Conferencing.

The meeting of the Bath-Highland Network Authority (BHNA) was called to order at 1:05 PM by Mr. David Blanchard. With no quorum at the beginning of the meeting and no members of the public in attendance, Mr. Blanchard skipped ahead to the Cell Service Update item on the agenda for discussion.

**Cell Service Update**

Ms. Nancy Witschey shared that Highland County is still trying to stir up interest for cell service providers in the McDowell area. The AT&T tower in Monterey is still on hold. Ms. Witschey also mentioned that it is looking like Highland County would need to construct the tower for the McDowell area; however, there is concern that if the tower is built, providers will not come or show interest. Mr. Blanchard asked if there was a location in mind for the tower. Ms. Witschey said yes, locations have been looked at and one looks promising. Ms. Witschey asked if the CARES Act broadband allocation could be used for construction of a cell tower. Mr. Robert Huff and Ms. Hunter Moore confirmed that cellular transmission equipment can be used under the CARES Act funding. Ms. Witschey asked if there would be an extension on the CARES Act application deadline and the group discussed that they didn't think there would be an extension.



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Ms. Witschey said it may be worth contacting Apex to see if a project is feasible with the CARES Act funding. Mr. Blanchard asked if the funding could be used to purchase equipment for 2021 project. Mr. Huff answered that the project would have to be lit or in-service. Ms. Moore confirmed that CARES Act projects would have to be in-service by December 25, 2020. The group discussed the short turn-around the CARES deadline causes, making a feasible project hard to accomplish in this timeframe. Ms. Moore will notify Authority members if she hears any news on how localities are using this CARES Act funding for broadband.

### **Broadband News**

Since the group had already discussed the Governor's \$30 million allocation for broadband under the CARES Act, Ms. Moore also mentioned the recent announcement of the opening of USDA's Community Connect Program and that applications are due on December 23, 2020. Local governments, nonprofits, small businesses are among eligible applicants and the award ceiling is \$3,000,000. Funding from this program provides financial assistance to allow broadband service in rural and economically challenged communities where broadband service is not available. Ms. Witschey asked if there was a match requirement. Ms. Moore said that there is a match but did not know the exact match amount. Ms. Moore will follow up with Nancy on the match requirement. Ms. Witschey asked if there was a match requirement for the CARES Act funding, and both Mr. Huff and Ms. Moore responded by saying there was no match requirement.

Ms. Moore asked if there were other broadband news. Ms. Witschey shared that Highland County submitted a VATI application with MGW and Augusta County. They expect to hear whether it is awarded or not in the beginning of 2021. Mr. Huff added that they may be able to announce awards earlier this year but VATI's challenge process could delay things. Their project did get challenged in the Augusta County project areas. Ms. Moore asked where the projects areas are located in Highland County. Mr. Huff responded with Doe Hill (North and South) in the McDowell area.

Mr. Ronald Wimer joined the meeting. Mr. Blanchard discussed improved cell service in Highland County to Bath County and asked if that was due to the new tower. Mr. Mike Bollinger said that if your cell service provider is Verizon, then this is not from the new tower because Verizon is not on the tower.

### **Provider Updates**

Mr. Huff gave an update on MGW activities. MGW is filling in fiber connections to their main offices and upgrading services for customers. Some activities are on hold while waiting on grant funding.

Ms. Witschey shared that she thought that HTC was working in the Big Valley area. Mr. Blanchard confirmed this and mentioned that HTC hopes to move into the Back Creek or the Valley Center area next year. Discussion ensued on costs on just customer connections and CARES funding.

### **2021 BHNA Meeting Schedule**

Ms. Moore referred to the tentative dates for next year's meeting on the agenda. She also mentioned that Ms. Witschey and Mr. Harrison's member terms were ending this year. They would either need to be re-appointed or replaced before the first 2021 meeting for elections. The group discussed whether to move the first meeting to February so that locality boards have time to meet and re-appoint members. The group decided this would be best and scheduled the first meeting for February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The group also decided to make this meeting virtual.



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### **Approval of the Minutes**

Meeting minutes of the past meeting on July 13, 2020 were provided to the members before the meeting by email. Ms. Witschey moved, seconded by Mr. Wimer, to approve the meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **Other Business**

Mr. Blanchard asked if there was any other business to discuss. Morgan Messer, the Director of External Affairs and Communication at the Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC) introduced herself and discussed their fiber ring system in their service area. Their board voted to work with localities on a case by case basis where that fiber ring was running through to see if there are any opportunities for partnerships with localities or internet service providers. The fiber ring does not go through Highland County but SVEC wanted to join the broadband conversation in case there are any questions about their fiber ring. Discussion ensued on possible future collaboration.

### **Adjournment**

With no further discussion, Ms. Witschey moved, seconded by Mr. Wimer, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

The BHNA meeting concluded at 1:45 PM. The next meeting will be held virtually on Monday, February 1st, 2021 at 1 PM.