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**Bath-Highland Network Authority
Organizational Meeting
Via Zoom Video Conference Call
Monday, February 1, at 1pm**

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

Call to Order

The meeting of the Bath-Highland Network Authority (BHNA) was called to order at 1:03 PM by Mr. David Blanchard.

Elections

Members discussed Ms. Nancy Witschey and Mr. Ashton Harrison's member terms that ended in 2020 and their replacement plans. Neither member has found a replacement yet. It was discussed that the election of officers will be held at the next BHNA meeting in April. Ms. Hunter Moore added that the member binders could be passed to their replacement and to let the CSPDC know if they need help with updating the binders or assistance in finding a replacement. Ms. Moore also stated that she thought there could not be a quorum without the member replacements in place.

Mr. Blanchard discussed the purpose of the broadband authorities and the benefits of being a broadband authority. Authorities can not only partner with internet service providers but can also apply for funding on their own. Ms. Moore confirmed this, and Mr. Harrison added that there are grant programs that will score applications higher if they are regional projects, which is another benefit of the Bath- Highland Network Authority. Mr. Blanchard concluded that authorities have a little more access to broadband funding as opposed to a local government. Ms. Witschey added that authorities can construct their own network if they choose to do this. Ms. Moore shared the recent proposed amendments



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to the Governor's budget regarding the VATI program, that would allow broadband authorities to apply for funding without partnering with an internet service provider.

With no quorum and no members of the public in attendance, Mr. Blanchard skipped ahead to the Insurance Renewal item on the agenda for discussion.

Insurance Renewal

Mr. Blanchard discussed the upcoming insurance renewal with VACORP and transferring the point of contact from Bath to Highland County. He will follow up with Roberta Lambert and possibly with Ms. Moore and Mr. Harrison to make sure this is taken care of. Ms. Moore said she forwarded the VACORP contact information to Mr. Blanchard but to let her know if there are additional questions. The renewal is due in March. Mr. Harrison added that Bath County could take care of the renewal this year if needed.

Broadband News

Ms. Moore reiterated the VATI program proposals to the Governor's budget. The proposals were recommendations of the state's Broadband Advisory Council. The proposals include creating a one-year pilot that will allow public broadband authorities to compete for funds from the VATI program. This would enable a broadband authority, or other public body, or non-profit organization to be eligible to receive VATI funds and also be the broadband service provider. These changes would need to be included in the final budget approved by the legislature. Mr. Blanchard asked if authorities had to also be the service provider under this pilot program or if they could still work with providers after receiving grant funds. Ms. Moore responded that there was not additional information on this at this time and that the flexibility of the pilot program is not clear.

Ms. Moore shared the Governor's recent announcement of VATI awards. The first round of awards includes \$29.6 million for 5 projects that will serve 11,743 homes and businesses in Virginia. A second round will be announced later and will include projects that were rescoped due to the impact of Rural Digital Opportunity Funds (RDOF). Ms. Moore asked Ms. Witschey and Mr. Huff if they had heard anything about their VATI application. Ms. Witschey said she had not heard anything. Mr. Huff shared that their project had one small area that was challenged in Augusta County and thinks that their application is currently being rescoped so that it can continue to move forward.

Ms. Moore announced a new grant opportunity called the Expanding Potential in Communities (EPIC) Grant program. The \$1 million grant funding will support cooperative, municipal, and community network projects in diverse, low-income communities in Washington, D.C. and 13 states including Virginia. This program will support local broadband expansion by funding Internet connectivity solutions in an effort to alleviate disparities in education, employment, and social welfare in under-connected communities. Applications will be accepted from January 25 - February 19, 2021 and funds will be distributed in April 2021. Projects that receive funding awards will range in value from \$125,000 to \$180,000. Mr. Blanchard asked if this program was geared for projects already in motion or proposed. Ms. Moore said she could check and follow up with that information.

Cell Tower Updates

Ms. Witschey shared that Verizon still has their tower project on hold for Monterey and may revisit it this year. For the McDowell area, there is still no interest showing up. Mr. Harrison asked about T-Mobile for the McDowell. Ms. Witschey said T-Mobile has not shown interest yet; however, T-Mobile does have some service in the McDowell area but may not



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be as strong as Verizon. Mr. Harrison shared that he switched to T-Mobile in Millboro Springs and service is better than Warm Springs. T-Mobile is also looking to upgrade to 5G but one would have to have a 5G device. Mr. Wimer shared that the T-Mobile feedback in McDowell varies. Some people find it not as good with coverage as Verizon while others T-Mobile coverage similar to Verizon. Mr. Harrison says as a customer, T-Mobile was having some technical issues with their new tower, but the issues seemed to be resolved about a week ago. Ms. Witschey asked if Verizon was still not on the new tower and Mr. Harrison responded that he didn't think so but could find out. Mr. Wimer added that from his understanding, just T-Mobile is on the tower, and they may have had trouble with the dishes lining up.

Provider Updates

Mr. Huff with MGW shared that there are no new, large expansion projects at this time, but they are some in engineering. They are waiting to hear about their VATI application outcome. Since the VATI awards have been delayed twice, they do not want this to throw off their schedule too much and are looking at some of the middle mile portions of the VATI projects to fund in-house. Other than that, MGW was been filling in fiber to the home in areas of Dry Run, Doe Hill and Mountain Grove. Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Huff discussed replacing copper with fiber and eventually abandoning copper systems. Mr. Huff explained that copper may stay longer in some areas.

Other Business

Ms. Moore announced that she was wrong about the meeting quorum. After reading the bylaws, she confirmed that members of the Authority shall serve until a successor is appointed and qualified. Therefore, the meeting did have quorum with Ms. Witschey and Mr. Harrison present, and could proceed to approve the minutes, since this was the only agenda item that needed approval from the board.

Approval of the Minutes

Meeting minutes of the past meeting on October 19, 2020 were provided to the members before the meeting by email. Ms. Witschey moved, seconded by Mr. Harrison, to approve the meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Before the meeting ended, Ms. Moore introduced Ms. Grace Blanchard and announced that Ms. Blanchard would be hosting the next BHNA meeting due to Ms. Moore being out on maternity leave this spring. Ms. Moore asked everyone to copy Ms. Blanchard on any future BHNA-related emails. The group decided that the next meeting would be held virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 precautions.

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

The BHNA meeting concluded at 1:35 PM. The next meeting will be held virtually on Monday, April 12, 2021 at 1 PM.