

Meeting Notes
York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, August 4, 2021 – 5:00 p.m.

Senior Center of York

5314 George Washington Memorial Highway, Yorktown, Virginia

Members Present: Mark Bellamy, Gregory “Skip” Brooks, Chad Green, Leigh Houghland, Montee Jons, Michel S. King, R. Anderson Moberg, Richard Myer, Sheila Myers, Jacob Rizzio (arriving late), Eugene Seiter, Cowles “Buddy” Spencer

Staff Present: Susan Kassel, Director of Planning and Development Services; Timothy Cross, AICP, Deputy Director of Planning and Development Services; Earl Anderson, AICP, Senior Planner; Amy Parker, Senior Planner; Cathy Tartabini, Planning Assistant; Richard Hill, Deputy County Attorney; Gail Whittaker, Public Information Officer; Jeanne Sgroi, Management Analyst Intern

Others Present: Douglas Holroyd, G. Stephen Roane, Jr.

Call to Order

Chairman King called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. and called on Mr. Cross to make an introduction. Mr. Cross introduced Cathy Tartabini, who is the new Planning Assistant in the Planning Division and will be providing administrative support to the Committee.

Approval of June 2, 2021, Meeting Notes

On motion of Mr. Houghland, the June 2, 2021, meeting notes were approved unanimously.

Committee Discussion of Draft Broadband Element

Chairman King commended the work by the staff in creating a well-organized and informative draft Broadband element. Mr. Cross stated that Ms. Sgroi is the author of the document, while Mr. Anderson assisted with the background research. Chairman King suggested that the Committee go through the document section by section and offer comments on questions that any members may have.

Mr. Myer suggested adding language to the discussion of wireless technology to note the use of emergency generators at cell tower sites.

Mr. Seiter asked if the map on page 4 showing internet coverage in the upper and lower County took federal facilities such as Camp Peary and the Naval Weapons Station into consideration. Mr. Anderson responded that federal facilities have their own infrastructure, which is not shown on the map. Ms. Sgroi referred to the map on page 5, noting that most of the upper County has access to just one Internet Service Provider while the lower County has two providers and even three in some places. Mr. Anderson added that the map on page 4 shows fiber broadband only. Mr. Seiter stressed the important of internet security. Mr. Anderson responded that there is discussion of internet security issues in the section of the draft dealing with lit and dark fiber. Ms. Myers commented that internet service in the upper County is substandard and that there are fewer options.

Sheila Myers asked from which providers the County is leasing bandwidth. Mr. Anderson responded that the specific providers could change so this section is intentionally general.

Sheila Myers asked for an estimate of the cost of Hampton Roads Regional Connectivity Ring and how it will be funded. Ms. Sgroi responded that no funding has been identified yet and there is no cost estimate. She added that the possibility of public-private partnerships has been discussed. Mr. Myers noted that

some localities are using funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Mr. Anderson responded that those are typically localities that have no internet service.

Mr. Roane asked if there is a concern that the County might not have the infrastructure to support 5G capability. Ms. Sgroi responded that wireless internet is a complement to fiber rather than a substitute for it. She explained that this is because it relies on fiber networks to carry the signal to towers. She added that 5G will never have the bandwidth capability that fiber does. Earl Anderson responded that fiber network infrastructure within the County is good.

Mr. Brooks expressed concern about the time-consuming environmental impact studies that might be associated with laying cable. Mr. Anderson responded that the cable would not necessarily be installed underground and that in many cases the equipment would be hung from power poles.

Mr. Seiter asked if the infrastructure is vulnerable to flooding. Ms. Sgroi responded that fiber cable is waterproof. Chairman King commented that the utility companies do not always cooperate in sharing infrastructure. Gene Seiter stated that he likes the idea of incorporating fiber cable installation into road construction projects.

Mr. Houghland asked about the timeline for the Peninsula portion of the project. Ms. Sgroi responded that the timeline has not yet been finalized.

Mr. Jons stated that one lesson from the global pandemic is that telecommuting works. He stated the rise of teleworking would have numerous repercussions such as reduced traffic and reduced need for office space. Mr. Anderson responded that this issue is addressed on page 8 of the draft element. Chairman King added that telecommuting has been a game-changer for the Defense Department and has reduced space needs. Mr. Green stated that teleworking also has implications for land use, noting that the County might not need as much land zoned for office space. Ms. Sgroi mentioned that some communities are building co-working space for residents to have access to technology and business equipment.

Mr. Myer suggested adding discussion to the section dealing with Public Safety and Other Government Facilities regarding the importance of telemedicine in certain areas. Mr. Bellamy commented that the County is considering the possible use of ARPA funds to linking various public facilities in the upper County with dark fiber and possibly leasing out bandwidth to other users.

Mr. Jons stated that lack of fast, reliable internet service affects lower income residents disproportionately. He said there are companies that offer programs that assist lower income residents in bridging the digital divide but that people don't know about them. He suggested mentioning these programs in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Anderson responded that this issue is addressed on page 9. He also noted that during the pandemic, the School Division was able to get students connected to the Internet. Mr. Hill asked if dark fiber would enable the County to provide internet access to people who are not served. Ms. Sgroi responded that it would not be possible because it would be a closed, secure County network. Sheila Myers commented that internet affordability is important as well as availability.

Sheila Myers suggested involving high school service clubs in providing tech support to help senior citizens with their computers.

Mr. Holroyd stated that he felt the implementation language should include a stronger statement that broadband should be treated as a utility. Ms. Kassel responded that unlike utilities, internet service provider do not have the right to enter onto private property.

Mr. Seiter commented that the "dig once" policy is a good idea but might be hard to implement since VDOT controls the roads in the County.

Sheila Myers suggested adding a statement the need to ensure that all school students have good access to broadband. Mr. Anderson responded that it appears to be covered in the first implementation strategy under Objective 3.

Leigh Houghland asked if the document should include some mention of Elon Musk's Starlink initiative to provide low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite internet access. Mr. Roane responded that he felt it would be very costly.

Mr. King thanked the members for their comments, and he asked Mr. Rizzio, who arrived late, if he had anything to add. Mr. Rizzio responded that he had sent written comments to Mr. Cross and had nothing to add to them.

Mr. Jons commented that staff did an amazing job on the draft Broadband element.

Discussion of Land Use Forums

Chairman King stated that public meetings to discuss land use are being planned for September. He stated that the purpose is to give citizens one more opportunity to offer input into the Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan before the Committee begins its discussions of land use. He said there would be one in each end of the County and that each meeting would include an information staff presentation followed by an "open house" sessions where citizens will be able to have one-on-one dialogue with the Committee members. Mr. Green recommended that the first forum be held in the upper County. Mr. Brooks spoke of the need for Committee members to be consistent in their conversations with the citizens. Mr. Cross responded that the main role of the members will be to listen rather than talk and that staff would be available to help answer any factual questions. He explained that staff has found this type of format to be particularly useful for obtaining constructive public input. Mr. Jons agreed, citing his experience attending such a meeting as a citizen in 1990. He added that the meetings will need to be well publicized. Chairman King responded that the Public Affairs Office has a lot of ways to get the word out and that the Committee members can assist by spreading the word among their neighbors and social contacts.

Citizen Comments

Tom Chamberlain, 270 Barlow Road, stated that he felt the draft document is very well done and that the Committee is on the right track with regard to its recommendations on broadband service. He commented that the Committee should keep in mind that the internet service providers are private entities, not public utilities, and that they do not want to be controlled as if they were utilities. Chairman King said it was a good point and agreed that while they are not public utilities, they are similar to utilities in that they provide essential infrastructure and that the County might have to provide incentives. He thanked Mr. Chamberlin for his comments and for attending the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:28 p.m.