

Henderson County
BROADBAND TASKFORCE: October 24, 2023

The Broadband Taskforce held a meeting on October 24th, at 6:00 p.m. at 1 Historic Courthouse Square.

Taskforce Member	Present	Absent
Commissioner Daniel Andreotta, Co-Chair	√	
Commissioner David Hill, Co-Chair	√	
David Davidson – Citizen	√	
Jason Alfrey – Henderson County Public Schools	√	
Sara Nichols – LOSRC	√	
Jimmy Brissie – Henderson County Emergency Management	√	
Johnny Duncan – Henderson County Sheriff's Office	√	

Also present: Chris Todd, Business & Community Development Director and Lee Stevens, Planner III.

Commissioner Andreotta, Taskforce Co-Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment:

None.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

Mr. Duncan moved to approve the minutes from the April 12, 2022, meeting. Motion passed.

Discussion:

Presentation: Broadband Expansion and Grant Updates

Mr. Michael Tanck, Director of Government Affairs at Charter Communications, gave a presentation on current broadband expansion efforts ongoing in Henderson County, including the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) and the Growing Rural Economies through Access to Technology (GREAT) grants. Mr. Tanck explained the overview of both grants and Spectrum's progress in delivering service throughout Henderson County as the recipient service provider for both grants. 3,336 addresses in Henderson County were identified for broadband access through RDOF and now have service connected. An additional 1,149 addresses were awarded through the GREAT grant and would require a local match from Henderson County to be built out. Future broadband grant opportunities offered by the state of North Carolina and the federal government (NTIA) were discussed, including Completing Access to Broadband (CAB), Stop-Gap, and Broadband Equity And Deployment (BEAD). The Taskforce discussed canvassing and advertising efforts, including education campaigns regarding affordable options for service under the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

Presentation: Completing Access to Broadband (CAB)

Ms. Sara Nichols, Regional Planner with the Land of Sky Regional Council presented the CAB grant as an option for leveraging Henderson County's federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that have been earmarked by the Board of Commissioners for broadband expansion. The rules for the grant have not been released yet, so it is not certain what local match requirements will be. North Carolina's goal is to have 98% of households connected to broadband and access is a high priority for the state's ARPA funds. Ms. Nichols shared the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) map of existing broadband coverage, which is more detailed than previous mapping efforts to help agencies better understand true unserved areas of the county. Mr. Todd explained that the role of the Taskforce could be 1) to determine where broadband access should be prioritized based on the group's knowledge of the county, 2) to let the public determine priority locations, or 3) to allow service providers to determine where broadband access should be prioritized based on their understanding of how to provide service to the most customers in a cost-effective way. Ms. Nichols identified areas on the NCDIT map where broadband access had been built out densely enough that small amounts of additional infrastructure could quickly connect more households at a low cost. The Taskforce discussed different types of broadband connections, explaining that fiber is the standard for level of service, but

if another means of access can deliver the same speed, then that address is considered adequately served. The Taskforce decided to examine two scenarios as a next step.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be scheduled after the Taskforce brings recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for review.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Commissioner Daniel Andreotta, Co-Chair and Commissioner David Hill, Co-Chair
Henderson County Broadband Taskforce

*Anyone can request a copy of the meeting recording by contacting County staff.