

Henderson County
BROADBAND TASKFORCE: February 7, 2024

The Broadband Taskforce held a meeting on February 7th, 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		O
Jason Alfrey – Henderson County Public Schools	√	
Sara Nichols – LOSRC		O
Jimmy Brissie – Henderson County Emergency Management	√	
Johnny Duncan – Henderson County Sheriff’s Office	√	

Also present: Chris Todd, Business & Community Development Director, Lee Stevens, Planner III, and Michael Tanck and Joe Prater of Charter Communications.

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

Public Comment:

Jeff Wickham spoke representing the River Ridge subdivision off Deep Gab Rd which currently has 34 homes with more under development. He commented that internet access and speed has been a struggle for years, and significantly lowered the sale price of the home for the previous owner. Starlink internet service is available, but lacks the speed to be feasible for remote work.

Laurie Fisher of Hungry River HOA on River Ridge Rd also spoke, explaining that one resident in her neighborhood has to rent an office in Hendersonville just to do her remote job. Ms. Fisher’s husband is an airline pilot, and the lack of reliable internet impacts his ability to review information for his work. She said that AT&T has a stranglehold on the area with DSL service that is insufficient. She offered assistance with grant writing to help secure more funds for deploying broadband access.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

Commissioner Andreotta moved to approve the minutes from the October 24th, 2023, meeting. Motion passed.

Discussion:

Presentation: Broadband Expansion and Grant Updates

Mr. Michael Tanck, Director of Government Affairs at Charter Communications, and Mr. Joe Prater, who oversees grants in SC, NC, and VA, gave a presentation on Spectrum’s continuing 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. Prater presented an overview of both grants and Spectrum’s progress in delivering service throughout Henderson County as the recipient service provider for both grants. With federal FCC funding of \$3,522,413, the RDOF grant identified 3,336 locations for service connection in Henderson County. At this time, 4,000+ addresses have been reached, exceeding the award amount, with the make-ready process 90% done and anticipated completion coming in Q3 2024. An additional 1,149 locations were awarded through the GREAT grant but 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).

Presentation: Completing Access to Broadband (CAB)

Mr. Todd presented updates to the CAB program 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. Mr. Todd explained the rules and the matching structure of the grant and showed how

much Henderson County's earmarked ARPA funds would bring in matching funds, alongside examples of other projects in the County to illustrate how many locations the earmarked funds could theoretically reach based on those estimates. Mr. Todd explained that directing funds towards high need areas is an option for CAB projects, as it can be included in the project's scope of work to be bid on by providers. The Taskforce asked questions about the standard of service required by the CAB program, and about how public safety and school data representing need could play a role in prioritizing high-need areas in the County for service. The taskforce suggested Mr. Todd be one of the evaluation team members for CAB project selection alongside NCDIT representatives. As a next step, the Taskforce asked Staff to create maps illustrating public safety, density, and currently unserved locations to help identify high-need areas and understand how committed funds could be used most effectively.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is scheduled for March 6th, 2024 at 6pm at 1 Historic Courthouse Square.

Commissioner Andreotta motioned for the meeting to be adjourned, the motion passed, and the meeting adjourned at 7:04 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.