

## **Special Called County Council Meeting**

October 19, 2020

6:00 PM

County Council met in special session in the Main Conference Room of the Administration Building, with Chairman Roy Costner presiding. Agendas, bearing date, time, and location of meeting were mailed to members of council and local news media on October 12, 2020.

### Council Members in Attendance:

Roy Costner, Chairman

Chris Bowers, Vice Chairman

Wes Hendricks, Vice Chairman Pro-Tem

Ensley Feemster

Carl Hudson

Trey Whitehurst

### Staff in Attendance:

Ken Roper, County Administrator

Meagan Nations, Clerk to Council

Les Hendricks, Contract Attorney

## **WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Roy Costner called the meeting of October 19, 2020 to order and welcomed those in attendance. Vice Chairman Chris Bowers led the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

## **BRIEFING ON ONGOING BROADBAND INITIATIVE**

Mr. Roper stated there is a lot of data in this presentation, and wanted to let Council know that staff is not requesting any action or recommendation for this evening. He stated what started this discussion was Council goals and he asked Mr. Farley from Alliance Pickens to look into this. He stated the first thing he recommended was that the County “goes to school” on this topic. Mr. Roper stated Mr. Farley, himself, Austin Dunn and Jessica Varney went to a class where they learned about where broadband was in Pickens County and in South Carolina.

Mr. Roper presented maps of the following and discussed in great detail:

- South Carolina, Areas of Need (Speed Tiers and Density of Unserved Households)
- Pickens County SC, Best Technology Available
- Pickens County SC, Areas of Need
- Pickens County SC Scorecard
- SC Broadband Infrastructure Program, Areas of Need with Program and Priority Targets

Mr. Roper presented the staff proposed plan, stating that over the past several months, it has become clear that broadband communication is lacking in Pickens County. He stated the communication and connectivity of County facilities is especially disjointed. He stated enhancing the internet connectivity between County buildings, such as Fire Stations, Recycle Centers, EMS Stations, etc. will benefit the citizens of Pickens County by enhancing communications between our emergency services stations and also by mitigating the safety risk in these more rural areas at recycle centers. Mr. Roper advised the long range goal is to build a backbone of fiber throughout the County from which the underserved households of citizens throughout the County can benefit. He stated the main focus for the first major push to extend broadband service to County facilities will be focusing in and around “Box 8,” (Liberty and Norris area) which is identified by

the state as the highest priority area in our County in need of broadband access with the highest density of underserved households.

Mr. Roper stated the staff proposes creating a fiber loop linking the following public facilities: The Chastain Road Recycling Station, Norris Fire Station, Liberty Rural #2, the Pickens County Airport, the Easley Recycling Station, Economic Development Office, N Old Pendleton Recycling Station, Liberty Rural Fire Station #1, and the Public Service Commission. He stated the fiber loop connecting these anchor institutions will increase the internet capability of these locations, run through an Opportunity Zone to connect a Fire Station and the Airport (which currently only has DSL internet), and run fiber lines through the areas of need with 200 or more underserved households. Once the loop encompassing Box 8 is established, the same method of connecting anchor institutions can be replicated in other areas around the County to address the connectivity issues, including in neighboring Box 7 in Central/Norris, Box 6 in Six Mile, Boxes 2, 3, 4 along Highway 11, and Box 5 in the Dacusville area. Box 1 in the far northwest area of the County will be the most difficult to reach since there is currently no County facility in that area. In this way, Box 8 will serve as a pilot program which can be used to achieve the same results in the other areas of need.

Mr. Roper presented a map of the proposed fiber route, and a letter from Pope Flynn on the property tax incentives for broadband investment.

Vice Chairman Chris Bowers asked how does this play into the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Roper stated we engaged in a private provider asking how we can help apply for CARES funding to extend your lines into these areas. He stated the private provider was very glad, and open that we were reaching out to them but at the end of the day, only the private provider can apply for the CARES funding. He stated the determined that they were better off applying for CARES Act funding somewhere other than Pickens County. He stated there are things about this that are constantly going to change. Mr. Roper presented the opportunity zone to Council.

Councilman Wes Hendricks stated he is a teacher and has several kids that cannot access internet to do schoolwork virtually because of where they live, even when using the hot spots. He stated on the first day of virtual learning for this school year, the internet went out and thousands of students could not do their virtual learning until it was back up. He stated there are a lot of errors that happen and it can be tough.

After more discussion between Council, Mr. Roper stated we are going to move forward with applying for grants and he just wanted Council to be aware of this.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: S.C. Code of Laws, Section 30-4-70 (a):**

Personnel – Section 30-4-70 (a) (1)

- Project Jericho
  - Proposed Contractual Arrangement
- Motion was made by Vice Chairman Chris Bowers, seconded by Councilman Ensley Feemster and carried unanimously (6-0), to convene in executive session for the stated purposes.

**ACTION AS NEEDED VIA EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEMS:**

Chairman Roy Costner called the Public Session back to Order and advised the following:

Personnel – Section 30-4-70 (a) (1)

- Project Jericho – Chairman Costner made a motion to authorize Ray Farley to move forward with Project Jericho, based on the constraints that Council put into place. Motion was seconded by Councilman Carl Hudson and carried unanimously (6-0).
- Proposed Contractual Arrangement – **No Action Taken**

**ADJOURN:**

Vice Chairman Chris Bowers made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded by Councilman Trey Whitehurst and carried unanimously. Pickens County Council stood adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectively Submitted:

Approved:

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Meagan Nations, Clerk to Council

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Roy B. Costner, III, Chairman of County Council