

MEETING NOTES

York 2040 Committee

Wednesday, October 2, 2019 – 5:00 p.m.
Public Works Multi-Purpose Room
105 Service Drive, Yorktown, Virginia

Members Present: Mark Bellamy, Gregory “Skip” Brooks, Chad Green, Michael S. King, Vivian McGettigan, Richard Myer, Sheila L. Myers, Jacob Rizzio, Eugene Seiter, and 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; Daria Linsinbigler, Planning Assistant; Justin Atkins, Assistant County Attorney; Gail Whittaker, Public Information Officer

Member Absent: Leigh Houghland, Montgoussaint “Montee” E. Jons, R. Anderson Moberg

Call to Order

Chairman King called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. and welcomed the Committee members.

Approval of September 4, 2019 Meeting Notes

The September 4, 2019 meeting notes were approved unanimously.

Broadband Overview of York County

Earl W. Anderson, AICP, Senior Planner, gave a presentation on broadband in York County. He said that the General Assembly amended the Code of Virginia to mandate that local comprehensive plans include strategies to provide broadband infrastructure that is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents and businesses in the locality. He stated that the future of technology in health care, education, public safety and economic development will rely heavily on the speed and reliability of broadband. He added that although York County does not have a current problem with coverage, improvements can always be made.

Mr. Anderson defined the base unit of information computing as “bits” and said that network speeds are measured in “bits per second”; the higher the number, the faster the speed:

- 1 Kilobit (Kbps) = 1,000 bits per second
- 1 Megabit (Mbps) = 1,000,000 bits per second
- 1 Gigabit (Gbps) = 1,000,000,000 bits per second

He noted that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) redefined broadband in 2018 to have a minimum speed of 25 Mbps downstream or download and 3 Mbps of upstream or upload.

He pointed out that people are currently using early versions of artificial intelligence on their phones and computers and that advances in technology will rely on the progression of broadband. He said that a Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) is the traditional technology used on

copper telephone lines and is considerably slower than other options. He stated that cable lines are marginally better with higher speeds but during periods of peak usage, upload or download times can be dramatically decreased. He said wireless technology can have high speeds but a provider can cap the network to limit usage. Mr. Anderson stated that the “gold standard” for current broadband is a fiber optics network, which is reliable, resilient, and has nearly unlimited expansion capabilities. He noted that although the initial cost of labor and construction are high, operating costs are considerably lower than for cable, DSL, or wireless and the fiber lines last for decades.

Mr. Anderson reported that the reason residents and business owners should be concerned about the types of broadband is that it can increase property values, create more efficient and integrated health care systems, and give households overall economic benefits. He displayed maps showing broadband coverage and stated that York County has sufficient coverage to meet the current needs of residents and businesses. He further described the two types of fiber: “lit” for public usage and “dark” for private usage. He said the County’s offices and schools use both.

In closing, Mr. Anderson suggested that possible broadband goals and objectives for the Comprehensive Plan could include such things as promoting high-speed broadband to:

- drive economic development
- create a more efficient and integrated health care system
- promote broader use of telework and smart transportation
- provide increased capability for first responders
- improve residential speeds
- increase the reliability of the network

Committee Discussion

Ms. Myers stated that fiber optic is not available in her neighborhood of Queens Lake. She said Verizon told her it will not install underground lines because of concerns about disturbing archeological resources. Mr. Brooks added that utility companies are apprehensive because of the costs of archeological studies, especially the more detailed Phase III studies, which can be expensive. Mr. Anderson agreed, stating that broadband providers look at return on investment when deciding where to invest in infrastructure and that it would be very expensive to install fiber optic cable in Queens Lake. He stated that he recently attended a broadband summit and learned that the investment cost of expanding fiber infrastructure currently outweighs the demand for it.

Chairman King said that ultimately, whether or not to invest in broadband infrastructure is an economic decision for the network providers, regardless of whatever goals and objectives are included in the Comprehensive Plan. The question, he said, is what can the County do to persuade private industry to implement its goals. In response, Mr. Anderson cited the example of Washington Square shopping center, where renovations were recently made to accommodate various County offices. He noted that fiber optic was installed by the provider, which hopes to sell strands to other users.

Mr. Seiter suggested requiring conduit for fiber optic to be installed underground in conjunction with road construction projects. Mr. King agreed while noting that it would have to be a statewide initiative since VDOT controls the roads in almost all the counties. He added that fiber could also be incorporated into other types of construction projects, such as water and sewer extensions.

Mr. Myer asked if the County requires fiber to be installed in new subdivisions, and Ms. Kassel responded that it does not.

Mr. Brooks stated that in many cases the National Park service will allow the ground disturbance for utilities but that the state historic preservation office (the Virginia Department of Historic Resources) has the authority to deny or approve.

Ms. Myers asked if any business owners are complaining about internet access, and Mr. Anderson answered that he is not aware of any but that it would be a question best addressed to Jim Noel, Director of Economic Development. Mr. Myer suggested that the Comprehensive Plan incorporate a goal for York County to facilitate telemedicine linkages between clinics which serve the under privileged citizens (Lackey Free Clinic) and local hospitals in order to improve quality of life.

Mr. Seiter commented that one advantage the County has is that it is surrounded by technology users, such as NASA-Langley and the Jefferson Lab, so the backbone of a network is there, and it might be just a matter of tying into that network. Mr. Green said that the big problem is the "last mile" and that the key to becoming wireless is for the County to have utility-friendly policies in place.

Mr. Rizzio asked if the County has any control over the speed of internet connectivity, and Mr. Anderson confirmed that speed is controlled by the providers. Mr. Anderson added that small cell wireless facilities with equipment mounted on structures 50 feet or less in height are one way to improve wireless service. He stated that the FCC recently adopted regulations requiring localities to allow these facilities.

Ms. Parker asked if Cox has fiber optic lines. Mr. Anderson responded that it does but that the providers do not like to disclose where their lines are or plans for future expansion because they do not want their competitors to have such information. He added that broadband providers will expand coverage if the investment is profitable. He noted that the Code of Virginia requires comprehensive plans to address broadband needs, yet it is the providers – not the localities – who control the availability of broadband.

Mr. King said that in the upcoming year or two it will be important to work closely with the Economic Development Office and local businesses to develop a broadband plan.

Other Business

Mr. Cross stated that the next committee meeting will be on November 6th at 5 p.m. He stated that the topic of the meeting will be housing, and that representatives from the Williamsburg and Virginia Peninsula Associations of Realtors will present an analysis of York County's housing market. Mr. Myer asked if the presentation will address new housing construction only or rehabilitation of existing housing as well. In particular, he noted the issue of sea level rise and

how it affects housing and the possible needs of elevating existing structures. Mr. Cross responded that he expects the discussion to be comprehensive. Mr. Green said that for the County to raise existing structures, he deems it highly unprofitable and the homes might not be worth raising. Gail Whittaker, Public Information Officer, attested to the fact that the grants for elevating existing structures are not for new construction, even though a new house may be more desirable and economical to some residents.

Mr. Rizzio asked if the County has a plan to move residents affected by sea level rise in flood prone areas. Mr. Cross responded that the County has no such plan for relocation. He stated that as part of a previous Comprehensive Plan update, there was an effort to discourage new home construction in vulnerable areas by reducing the allowable density but that a subsequent effort to implement this goal through zoning was met with citizen opposition and was only moderately successful.

Ms. Kassel explained the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood maps and how the County regulates the building or raising of houses in the flood zone. Ms. McGettigan added that sea level rise will be discussed as a separate topic at a future meeting.

Mr. Green cautioned against overreacting to sea level rise and expressed confidence in the nation's ability to address the problem.

Citizen Comment Period

There were no citizen comments.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.