



Foothills Regional Commission
Full Board Meeting
December 14th, 2023
Minutes

Board Members Present

- Fred Baisden, Polk County
- Max Hopper, Cleveland County
- Doug Bridges, Cleveland County
- Bob Boyette, City of Marion
- Carol Pritchett, Town of Lake Lure
- Tommy Greene, Town of Boiling Springs
- Larry Dooley, Cleveland County
- Ashley Wooten, McDowell County
- Jack Shytle, Town of Polkville
- Scott Webber, Town of Spindale
- Justin Conner, Town of Forest City
- Jimmy Dancy, Town of Rutherfordton
- David Moore, Polk County
- Marche Pittman, Polk County
- Dean Buff, McDowell County
- Steve Garrison, Rutherford County

FRC Staff Present

- Danna Stansbury
- Charlotte Sullivan
- Amanda Scott
- Annette Staley
- Pam Hall
- Laura Lynch
- Alan Toney
- Magnolia Long

Virtual

- Peter O'Leary, Village of Chimney Rock
- Michael Kelly, NC Rural Center
- Joe Freddoso, Mighty River, LLC

Guests

- Margaret Annunziata, ICC President
- Roger Kumpf, Regional Director for Congressman Patrick McHenry
- Tommy Laughter, Regional Representative for Congressman Chuck Edwards
- Cathy Swafford, Town of Spindale
- Janet Mason, Town of Forest City
- Zachary Parker, Town of Boiling Springs

Board Members Absent

- Bryan King, Rutherford County
- Jeffery Emory, Town of Grover
- Tom Helton, Town of Ellenboro
- Rick Howell, City of Shelby
- Bill Ingram, Town of Tryon
- Janet Gerald, Town of Kingstown
- Scott Neisler, City of Kings Mountain
- Ray Padgett, Town of Lawndale
- Mark Phillips, Town of Columbus
- Jeff Swink, Town of Bostic
- Dorris Weaver, Town of Fallston
- David Guy, Town of Ruth
- Rodney Willis, Town of Bellwood



Call to order

The Full Board Meeting of the Foothills Regional Commission was held in the Business Sciences Building, Room 15, at Isothermal Community College on December 14th, 2023. Chairman Fred Baisden called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm and welcomed everyone. Ashley Wooten gave an invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Then, the board enjoyed lunch together.

Approval of minutes

Chairman Fred Baisden requested approval of the October 3rd, 2023, Board meeting minutes. Tommy Greene motioned, and Carol Pritchett seconded.

There were specific amendments to the minutes, and they are as follows:

- Doug Bridges and Dean Buff attended the October 3rd, 2023, meeting.
- On page 4, change Clayton County Fair to Cleveland County Fair.

Decision: The board voted unanimously to approve the amended minutes.

Reports

1. NC Rural Center Presentation

Michael Kelly (NC Rural Center):

- Stated that the NC Rural Center's Collaborative Broadband project, funded by the Dogwood Health Trust, aims to coordinate regional broadband initiatives in rural North Carolina. The initiative has expanded to 18 counties and the Qualla Boundary, leveraging local councils' experience, developing regional action committees, and navigating federal and state broadband funding opportunities. The project serves as an aggregator of information, convener of critical stakeholders, recruiter of interested Internet Service Providers (ISP), facilitator of negotiations between ISPs and local governments, and coordinator of state funding agencies. The project aims to make broadband accessible in every corner of North Carolina.
 - Introduced the Co-Founder and COO of Mighty River, LLC, Joe Freddoso.
 - Stated that the Rural Center Collaborative Broadband Project, led by CEO Freddoso, focuses on Dogwood Health Trust Counties, ensuring accountability during the construction and implementation of GREAT, CAB, Stop-Gap, and BEAD, despite facing challenges and potential impacts.
 - Stated that the state is finalizing vendors for two ARPA-funded broadband infrastructure programs, Completing Access to Broadband Fund and Stop-Gap Fund. The grants are expected to be released in January and run until June 2024. County-required matches will be based on ARPA funds. CAB grants will be awarded in early summer and negotiated to establish an accountability agreement with providers.
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- Stated that the BEAD Program, receiving 1.5 billion from the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, will be replicated in two initial proposal volumes. The state will identify eligible entities and select winning grant applicants, replicating the GREAT Grant Program, CAB, and Stop-Gap Program. County and local governments will have opportunities to add community anchor institutions, residential and business locations, and challenge missing locations. Grant processes will begin in the fall of 2024 and continue into 2025.

**NC Remaining
Broadband
Infrastructure
Funds**

Total DHT Unserved and Underserved before ARPA GREAT	110631
Total DHT Unserved and Underserved after ARPA GREAT	77927
Total NC Unserved and Underserved	502368
Total NC Unserved and Underserved after ARPA GREAT	358322
% DHT Unserved and Underserved	22%
Total Funding Remaining	
BEAD	\$ 1,500,000,000.00
ARPA CAB	\$ 400,000,000.00
ARPA Stop-Gap	\$ 90,000,000.00
Total Funding Remaining	\$ 1,990,000,000.00
With Service Provider Match	\$ 2,487,500,000.00
Allocation per location (all NC)	
	\$ 6,942.08
GREAT Cost Per Pass DHT Counties Only	\$ 3,727.71

**Dogwood Health Trust Counties
Current Status of Broadband Infrastructure Need (Source: NC DIT)**

County	Approximate Total BSLs	Percent Unserved	Number Unserved	Percent Underserved	Number Underserved	Percent with Fiber	Number with Fiber
Avery	14184	2.39%	339	12.63%	1791	28.62%	4059
Buncombe	110636	2.83%	3131	1.12%	1239	25.13%	27803
Burke	41521	8.22%	3413	4.91%	2039	6.59%	2736
Caldwell	38725	4.47%	1731	3.79%	1468	12.39%	4798
Cherokee	19254	22.66%	4363	0.29%	56	32.05%	6171
Clay	8254	46.67%	3852	1.62%	134	36.46%	3009
Cleveland*	45591	13.88%	6328	0.00%	0	11.87%	5412
Graham	5600	61.41%	3439	0.13%	7	0.29%	16
Haywood	35030	10.02%	3510	1.36%	476	24.06%	8428
Henderson	54511	10.53%	5740	2.33%	1270	34.41%	18757
Jackson	26796	47.06%	12610	9.81%	2629	11.87%	3181
Macon	26985	47.57%	12837	1.38%	372	16.94%	4571
Madison	13121	5.80%	761	0.87%	114	87.13%	11432
McDowell	21828	26.04%	5684	3.59%	784	3.27%	714
Mitchell	9794	7.27%	712	2.94%	288	72.13%	7064
Polk	11144	51.56%	5746	2.49%	277	23.48%	2617
Rutherford	34592	21.91%	7579	15.42%	5334	26.55%	9184
Swain	9926	62.38%	6192	4.01%	398	0.14%	14
Transylvania	19322	15.35%	2966	1.40%	271	28.92%	5588
Yancey	12712	5.31%	675	0.60%	76	79.60%	10119
Totals	559525	16.37%	91608	3.40%	19023	24.25%	135673

Impact of ARPA GREAT Grants (source NC DIT)

County	GREAT Winner	GREAT Total with Match	Locations Total	Cost Per Location
Avery	Spectrum	\$ 2,646,740.00	234	\$ 11,310.85
Buncombe	Frontier	\$ 3,893,272.00	964	\$ 4,038.66
Buncombe	SkyRunner	\$ 2,217,219.00	493	\$ 4,497.40
Burke	Spectrum	\$ 5,524,972.00	1119	\$ 4,937.42
Caldwell	Spectrum	\$ 889,589.00	132	\$ 6,739.31
Cherokee	Blue Ridge Mtn. EMC	\$ 5,252,279.50	1778	\$ 2,954.04
Cherokee	CND Acquisition Corp	\$ 4,079,957.60	1405	\$ 2,903.88
Clay	Blue Ridge Mtn. EMC	\$ 10,979,937.00	3380	\$ 3,248.50
Cleveland	Spectrum	\$ 6,282,788.00	1120	\$ 5,609.63
Graham	Zitel	\$ 3,134,061.18	897	\$ 3,493.94
Graham	Zito Media	\$ 729,313.00	217	\$ 3,360.89
Haywood	Spectrum	\$ 1,022,411.00	182	\$ 5,617.64
Henderson	Spectrum	\$ 5,297,652.00	1149	\$ 4,610.66
Jackson	Spectrum	\$ 4,497,486.00	1156	\$ 3,890.56
Jackson	Balsam West	\$ 2,860,154.00	636	\$ 4,497.10
Macon	Frontier	\$ 4,434,827.00	2700	\$ 1,642.53
Macon	Balsam West	\$ 1,167,534.00	263	\$ 4,439.29
Madison	French Broad EMC	\$ 2,817,217.40	657	\$ 4,288.00
McDowell	Spectrum	\$ 7,459,995.00	1343	\$ 5,554.72
Mitchell	French Broad EMC	\$ 3,696,732.05	1921	\$ 1,924.38
Polk	Spectrum	\$ 12,084,196.00	3531	\$ 3,422.32
Rutherford	Spectrum	\$ 13,577,914.00	2918	\$ 4,653.16
Swain	Zito Media	\$ 4,681,177.99	1619	\$ 2,891.40
Swain	Cherokee Cablevision	\$ 1,978,742.29	548	\$ 3,610.84
Transylvania	Zitel	\$ 5,326,238.34	1572	\$ 3,388.19
Transylvania	Comporium/Citizens	\$ 4,875,037.00	698	\$ 6,984.29
Yancey	French Broad EMC	\$ 503,724.39	72	\$ 6,996.17
		\$ 121,911,166.74	32704	\$ 3,727.71

Comments:

- Mr. Freddoso said he would send FRC a full copy of the PowerPoint presentation.
- Jimmy Dancy: Asked Steve Garrison if he had any comments on what was presented.
- Mr. Garrison: Stated that although Rutherford County has not yet spent all its ARPA funds, they are fully committed to other projects. Rutherford County has invested, through the GREAT grant, \$1 million of its ARPA funds towards Charter Spectrum Internet. Charter Spectrum also received RDOF funds to cover a large section of Rutherford County. Mr. Garrison noted that the County was also a part of other grant opportunities that have significantly contributed to increasing broadband in the County.
- Marche Pittman: Stated that this was the first time he had heard of this opportunity and asked if the Rural Center had reached out to anyone else in the room. No one present had been contacted.
- Ashley Wooten: Stated that all counties face a challenge because of the need for broadband.
- Mr. Wooten and Mr. Garrison also expressed the need for the maps to be accurate and that they do not have the resources to check the data, and they are hoping that Jack and others at FRC can help collect this data.

2. ICC Update

Margaret Annunziata (President of ICC):

- Stated that ICC received \$30 million from the General Assembly for its Health Sciences Building, a premier training facility. Projects include library renovations, infrastructure improvements, technology upgrades, and DOT allocation for a connector road from the Agribusiness Campus to the Barn and Riding Arena.
- Informed the board that the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) has approved ICC to offer complete curriculum programs at its Polk Campus, expanding student opportunities. The school also provides a Powers Promise scholarship for short-term workforce programs, Be Great in Eight, and a chat box on its website. These changes have led to decreased course withdrawal rates and increased success rates. ICC is also recognized as a top-ranked LPN program and supports community members through its Animal Assistant Interactions Program.
- Stated that ICC is enhancing partnerships with employers and the community to provide the necessary workforce for the community. They have received support from business and industry partners, providing funding for programs and equipment. They also offer space for small business incubation in their Walter Dalton Workforce Development building.

3. FRC Department updates

Charlotte Sullivan

- Informed the board that FRC had finished all the 2021, 2022, and 2023 fiscal year audits. The auditors will be at the next meeting in February 2024 to present the FY2023 audit.
- Informed the board that Danna and Charlotte will meet with the League of Municipalities and Local Government Commission in January to create a partnership to help some of the smaller government units with financial assistance.

Pam Hall

- Announced there is an opening for a Housing Counselor at FRC.

Annette Staley

- Announced that the Workforce Board applied for The Partnership Sector Grant, aimed at industry-specific recruitment, job fairs, and employer training to address the unemployment rate, which was as follows:
 - i. McDowell 3.3
 - ii. Polk 3.1
 - iii. Rutherford 4.5
 - iv. Cleveland 3.4

Laura Lynch

- Stated that the Area Agency on Aging is working on its 4-Year Area Plan. The plan is put together with input from senior adults, service providers, and local government entities to direct and plan the work they will be doing over the next four years.
- Informed the board that the Needs assessments will be sent out on paper and digitally. This assessment will help determine the needs of our region.
- Stated that the ARPA money through the Division of Aging and Adult Services must be utilized by September 30th, 2024. Currently, a couple of providers will not be using the funds. If the funds are not operated by March, they will be shifted to organizations that can use them.

Alan Toney

- Introduced Magnolia Long as the new Senior Planner.
- Informed the board that FRC had been selected for a Safe Streets for All grant, a federal program.
- Informed the board that Dogwood Health Trust gave FRC funds to start working on a Regional Housing Study, which will begin next month in Polk County.
- Informed the board that he had included all four counties in the project and that Dogwood Health Trust would fund it.
- Announced that Farmland preservation continues to grow in Macon County, Jackson County, and Durham County.

4. Executive Director Updates

Danna Stansbury:

- Thanked Dr. Annunziata for letting them meet at ICC. The meeting had to be moved because FRC had a roof issue.

Announcements

Danna Stansbury:

- The Legislative Breakfast is on January 29th, 2024, at the Tryon International Equestrian Center at 8 am.
- Announced Amanda Scott as the new Board Clerk.
- The Executive Committee approved Annette Staley as the new Workforce Development Board Director.
- Zachary Parker is the new Manager for the Town of Boiling Springs.

Other Announcements

- Tommy Greene: Commended Danna and the FRC Staff for their excellent work.
- Roger Kumpf: Noted that Congressman McHenry is out for the year; he is focusing all his time on the financial services committee as chairman and is not running again for reelection.
- Tommy Laughter: Noted Congressman Edwards got appointed to the Appropriation Committee and noted that Congressman Edwards petitioned to stay on the Budget Committee so he would know what money was coming in and how it would be spent.

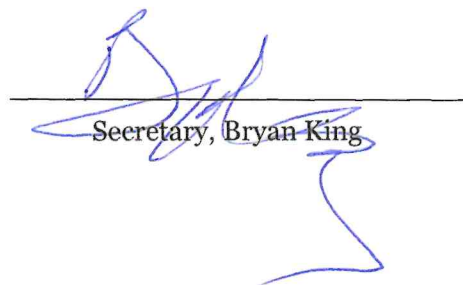
Adjournment

Chairman Fred Baisden adjourned the meeting at 1:34 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Chairman, Fred Baisden



Secretary, Bryan King