

VIRGINIA: AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HELD IN THE POWHATAN VILLAGE BUILDING AUDITORIUM, 3910 OLD BUCKINGHAM ROAD IN POWHATAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AND REMOTELY BY ELECTRONIC MEANS ON JUNE 10, 2020, AT 6:30 P.M.

Those present

Board of Supervisors Present: David T. Williams, District 1, Chairman, present in the Village Building auditorium
Larry J. Nordvig, District 2, present in the Village Building auditorium
Michael W. Byerly, District 3, present in the Village Building auditorium
Bill L. Cox, District 4, present in the Village Building conference room
Karin M. Carmack, District 5, Vice Chairman, present in the Village Building auditorium

Board of Supervisors Absent: None

County Staff Present: Bret Schardein, Interim County Administrator, present in the Village Building auditorium
John Wood, Director of Information Technology, present in the Village Building auditorium

Guests Present: Dr. Christopher Ali, present in the Village Building auditorium

1. Call to Order

Chairman Williams called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

- a. Identify Board members physically and/or electronically present

Mr. Williams identified the Board members and Mr. Schardein.

- b. Identify opportunities for the public to access and participate in the electronic meeting

County Administration staff will accept emailed comments at administration@powhatanva.gov. Any comments received until 6:30 pm, on the day of the meeting will be entered into the meeting minutes.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Byerly led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Invocation

Mr. Nordvig led the Invocation.

4. Requests to Postpone Agenda Items and Additions, Deletions or Changes in the Order of Presentation

There were no requests to amend the Agenda.

5. Formal Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Carmack moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Mr. Nordvig seconded the motion.

David T. Williams, Larry J. Nordvig, Michael W. Byerly, Bill L. Cox, Karin M. Carmack voted AYE

**VOTE 5-0
MOTION Passed**

6. Public Comment (time limit 3 minutes per individual/5 minutes per group, 30 minutes total time limit that can be extended by the Board)

Chairman Williams opened the public comment period. Speakers were as followed:

Kim Hymel, 4067 Old River Trail. School Board member representing District 5. Ms. Hymel thanked the Board of Supervisors for holding the meeting. She presented the challenges of distance learning explaining the lack of internet connection available to herself and students within District 5.

Tyler Schwend, 955 Clayton Rd. Mr. Schwend expressed this was his first meeting he has attended. He further explained that he struggles to stay connected with the outside world so in turn the broadband penetration in Powhatan is important to him.

Paula Duncan, 5903 Derwent Rd. Ms. Duncan is seconding what Ms. Hymel stated in a former public comment. She explains the amount of money she has needed to put forth to do her job as a remote teacher from Powhatan High School and expresses her excitement that the broadband discussion is starting to take place. She hopes the Board takes this issue very seriously as they have seen and experienced the difficulties that the lack of internet access has done to distance learning.

Gregory Goergen, 1995 Old Tavern Rd. Mr. Goergen and his family moved to Powhatan two years ago and were told the house came with DSL internet. Unfortunately, when the previous owners tried to transfer the DSL to them, Verizon canceled their services. His family has had to purchase a key one line which is 1.5 megabytes per second. Mr. Goergen is a work at home IT developer, due to his work they pay four hundred and fifty dollars a month for their internet access. His children are homeschooled, so they have to schedule their education around the times he needs to work. He explains that other counties he has lived in have partnered with electric companies who already have the equipment and foundation to provide high speed internet and fiber optic internet. Expressing his awareness that this meeting was about broadband he asked the Board if they were focusing on one single solution or if the County is looking at any other options.

Hannah Mauck, 3379 Upper River Way. Ms. Mauck seconded what everyone else had been saying during the public comment period. She stated that internet access is not a luxury but is a true necessity. Both her and her husband work from home and they have children at home who are distance learning due to the pandemic. Even with three hotspots within their home it will still take 10 minutes for her child's assignments to download, causing frustration. Ms. Mauck expressed her idea that the pandemic could bring more people into rural areas, thus the need to have better technology.

7. New Business

Mr. Schardein Shared two advancements with the Board about broadband. He stated that Evan Weiner, with Hosted Backbone was there to listen in on the meeting. His company is doing some expansions in the Walnut Creek subdivision that is funded by the community's developer, Emerald Homes. Secondly, Powhatan has made a joint application along with Goochland County through USDA reconnect program with Firefly Broadband. He added that if we are awarded that, 1,500 homes in Powhatan will have access to high speed broadband internet. The areas in Powhatan that will be granted this are west of Routes 522 and 13 including some that are north of Rt. 711. This would be a 7-million-dollar investment by Firefly. If awarded, this will be announced in the late fall, and construction would begin sometime in 2021 and would be about a two year build out.

- a. Discussion on Broadband facilitated by Dr. Christopher Ali Page

Chairman Williams introduced the guest speaker for the evening, Dr. Christopher Ali.

Dr. Ali thanked the Supervisors for having him there and expressed his appreciation to everyone listening in on the meeting and sharing their stories regarding broadband. He began by noting what he came there to discuss:

1. His research and the state of broadband
2. Technologies of broadband
3. Funding programs available
4. To have a larger conversation of broadband in Powhatan but also in the larger United States

Dr. Ali began his presentation explaining how the spread of COVID-19 has made the poor broadband infrastructure visible to America. He stated that broadband in fact is not a luxury but a necessity and a right, and how not all broadband is created equal, it will depend on the type of connected someone has.

He went over what his presentation will cover.

1. What is broadband?
2. Why is broadband Important?
3. What is the problem?
4. Can't I just use my phone?
5. Why don't I have broadband?
6. How do I get broadband?
7. What's next?

Next, he began to talk about the question, what is broadband? He explained that broadband is an "always on" connection of 25 mbps for download and 3 mbps upload. This means someone could possibly send an email and stream Netflix at the same time but cannot stream Netflix and a video conference at the same time. On average in the United States the download speed is 135 mbps and the upload speed is 52 mbps. When the two are compared, download is for consumption and upload is for production. This causes the consumption to become more privileged than the production in our Country.

Dr. Ali moved onto the question, why is Broadband important?

1. It is needed for economic development.
2. Broadband in a community lowers unemployment rate.
3. Raises the value of homes by 3.1%.
4. Assists education, 70% of teachers assign homework online.
5. Assists health care, allows doctors to upload patient files.
6. Increases civil engagement.

He explained the technologies of broadband. He listed some of these technologies which included the DSL, satellites, and mobile/cellular hotspots.

Dr. Ali talked about the technologies with faster connections. He discussed three more technologies, which included fixed wireless, cable, and fiber.

He showed an image that contained the comparison of broadband technologies of download and upload speeds between rural and urban areas.

Next, he shared a question that was emailed to him from a Powhatan resident and he answers the question.

Dr. Ali explains that mobile is not a replacement for fixed Broadband due to data caps, throttling, signal interruptions etc.

Next, Dr. Ali spoke about the question, why don't I have broadband?

He explained the mapping of broadband and pointed out the major flaws that the FCC have for mapping out broadband.

Dr. Ali shared that according to the FCC Powhatan is 100% served with broadband and 81% is served by at least 3 providers.

He then shared data showing Powhatan with the satellite removed. Now only 18% of the County does not have access to broadband and 75% has access to only one provider.

He then moved onto explaining the FCC's new program.

He explained that 5G and LEO's will not be coming anytime soon to rural America.

Dr. Ali discussed that not all broadband is created equal.

He provided tips on steps that every community can take.

Dr. Ali thanked the Board for giving him an opportunity to talk and sharing his knowledge of broadband.

Chairman Williams opened the floor to questions for Dr. Ali.

Mrs. Carmack asked how much money they should have in savings to make this a possibility. Dr. Ali could not provide an amount but gave an example of a rural town of 10,000 people in Minnesota. The town has 99.93% broadband to the home, costing about 12 million dollars. They received a grant from the State of Minnesota for 5 million, bonded 1 million, and a company they partnered with in South Dakota funded the rest of the money.

Mrs. Carmack continued the conversation and asked what the next steps would look like. Dr. Ali provided his professional opinion on what those steps might look like.

Mrs. Carmack asked about the FCC mapping and stated that it would need to change for anything else to be able to change. Dr. Ali suggested to actively reach out to the FCC and complain about the incorrect mapping data.

Mr. Cox came forward with a few things for Dr. Ali. First, he stated that Verizon has not only stopped providing coverage in Powhatan, but they are unwiring us.

Next, Mr. Cox posed a question about wireless tower systems and inquired on Dr. Ali's thoughts. Dr. Ali responded he believes them to be viable interim solutions to fiber to the home. He stated if the County can afford fiber to the home to do that instead of fiber to the towers, but he doesn't negate the fact that it is expensive.

Mr. Cox expressed his concern with the data collected from the electric co-op Southside Services in Powhatan versus what constituents have to say about the need of better services and asked Dr. Ali if he could clarify that for him. Dr. Ali provided some examples and suggestions.

Mr. Nordvig asked what Dr. Ali could suggest to the citizens that they could do to right now to get better internet. Dr. Ali shared that his gut reaction is there is nothing they can do.

Next, Mr. Nordvig asked if there is a situation where they can provide more ways of internet to the citizens. Dr. Ali shared that a company wired public parks in Charlottesville. He suggested negotiating with a company for hotspots.

Mr. Nordvig posed another question. He asked if Dr. Ali had seen a situation where someone needed to motivate someone in the senate or congress etc. to help with the issue at hand. Dr. Ali provided his opinion that conducting meetings centered around issues of broadband can be powerful for elected Officials. He suggested to invite State Representatives from Northern Virginia to see the large difference in broadband coverage.

Mr. Nordvig asked Dr. Ali if he knew of any way to get funded for broadband. Dr. Ali could not provide an answer just yet.

Mr. Byerly made statements on the subject of money and bringing broadband to Powhatan.

Next, he asked Dr. Ali if they were in a better position to receive money VHEI rather than the federal government due to the FCC mapping. Dr. Ali answered yes to his question.

My. Byerly asked another question regarding funding and asked Dr. Ali where other counties are getting their funding from.

Mr. Byerly asked if Dr. Ali has heard of employers possibly wanted to help get Broadband out to the county due to their employees working from home with slow connection.

Chairman Williams opened the floor to questions from the public for Dr. Ali.

Mr. Schardein read questions for Dr. Ali and the Board.

Mr. Nordvig asked Dr. Ali to clarify the connection between 5G and public health.

Next, Mr. Nordvig asked if the satellites would obscure the starry sky at night. Dr. Ali had no comment.

Mr. Schardein presented more questions from citizens.

Chairman Williams thanked Dr. Ali for his presentation.

8. Public Comment (time limit 3 minutes per individual/5 minutes per group, 30 minutes total time limit that can be extended by the Board)

Chairman Williams opened the second public comment period. Speakers were as followed:

Evan Weiner, P.O. Box 1 Oilville VA, with Hosted Backbone. Mr. Weiner began talking about grants through some different providers. He stated that in his opinion the grant process needs to be considered and rethought out. Referring to what Dr. Ali mentioned earlier, he discussed the repercussions of the out of date data and what that does to the process of applying for grants.

Seeing there were no further speakers, Chairman Williams closed the Public Comment period.

11. Board Comments

Mr. Nordvig asked Mr. Schardein to address why the county has not reopened yet. Mr. Schardein explained the reopening plan. The local phase was set to happen on June 15, 2020. He further explained some procedures that will be conducted during the reopening stages.

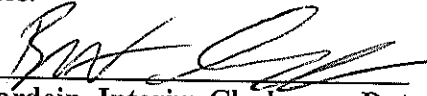
Next, Mr. Nordvig commented on people asking for schools to be reopened. He suggested the Board try to pass the word along that the citizens of Powhatan would like schools to reopen. He reassured the citizens that they do hear them and are trying to bring light to the issue at hand.

Mr. Cox made a statement on construction coming up in Powhatan. He further stated that Powhatan schools will not be out of remote learning any time soon based on what regulations the Governor put on school transportation.


12. Adjournment

Chairman Williams adjourned the meeting at 8:30pm.

These minutes were approved at the July 27, 2020 meeting of the Powhatan County Board of Supervisors.



Bret Schardein, Interim Clerk Date
Powhatan County Board of Supervisors



David T. Williams, Chairman Date
Powhatan County Board of Supervisors

Recorded Vote:

<i>David T. Williams</i>	AYE
<i>Larry J. Nordvig</i>	AYE
<i>Michael W. Byerly</i>	AYE
<i>Bill L. Cox</i>	AYE
<i>Karin M. Carmack</i>	AYE