

Telecommunications Commission Minutes January 22, 2009

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Thomas Kimbrell called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m. in the County Administration conference room in the Administration Center, located at 1300 Courthouse Road.

II. Roll Call

The following members were present: Thomas Kimbrell, Alicia Knight, Danielle Davis, John Johnson, Jr., and Edward Sullivan. Also in attendance was Marie Schuler representing Comcast, and Paul Miller from Verizon. Michele Lansford, Public Information Office, and Jason Hill, Information Technology Department, represented the County.

III. Election of Officers for 2009

Ms. Knight moved that Mr. Lottes retain his position as chair, and that Mr. Kimbrell continue to serve as vice chair; Mr. John Johnson second the motion; it was approved unanimously.

IV. Presentations by the Public

There were no members of the public present.

V. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Sullivan moved to approve the December 16, 2008 minutes; Ms. Davis seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.

VI. Members' Concerns

Ms. Knight reported that she is gathering information about public access programming, and plans to work with localities of similar size to study their articles of incorporation and talk to station managers. In addition to continuing to pursue an agreement with the Stafford County schools to use their studio facilities and work with students who produce videos, she will look at facilities at Germanna Community College and James Monroe as alternatives.

Mr. Sullivan said he would talk further with Dr. Sawyer, superintendent of schools, about public access. He will also update him about efforts to broadcast School Board meetings live.

Mr. Hill said he has a solution that will allow live broadcasts of School Board meetings, and is working with VTS, Comcast and Verizon. He is confident that he will be able to present a solution at the commission's meeting in February.

Mr. Miller said Verizon is also estimating the cost to run fiber from the Bandy Complex to the Administration Center for the broadcasts. Ms. Knight asked when the estimate will be available, to which he responded that the project manager who will make the decision is ill. Ms. Knight

asked for the information as soon as possible, but pointed out that the County had to work with what was available now to get the School Board meetings aired live.

Ms. Davis asked Ms. Schuler for the status of this project at Comcast's end. She said she will have to review her notes, and will let the commission know. Mr. Hill said that if the County goes with the Comcast solution as he understands it, Verizon will not be involved until the company and Comcast work out a compromise.

Ms. Davis thanked Ms. Schuler for expediting service to 21 Ashburn Lane. She also inquired about cable outages in Augustine, to which Ms. Schuler replied that she was unaware of the problem. Ms. Davis said the problem must have been resolved.

Ms. Davis told Mr. Miller that Mr. Hunter thanks him for his help with a problem. She asked if there were plans in place to offer service in Meadowbrooke Estates, to which he replied not at this time.

Ms. Knight asked Mr. Hill how much money the Board of Supervisors has allotted for live streaming of meetings – he replied \$26,000. She asked staff to let the commission know at the February meeting from which account the funds will be taken.

Mr. Sullivan said he lost HD reception just before the college bowl games, called the regular cable service number, and had two service vans show up and quickly resolve the problem.

In response to questions from the members, Ms. Lansford displayed two brochures (one in English, the other in Spanish), from Cox that explain the digital transition. Ms. Lansford and other staff are also working to schedule a representative from the FCC to make presentations to senior citizens about what they need to do to prepare for the change.

VII. Presentation by County Tourism Manager

M.C. Moncure, Tourism Manager, gave a presentation about proposed programming for the government cable channels. She is working with "TravelHost" magazine to promote regional tourism, one facet of which is high-quality video programs which will run on cable channels in lodging throughout the region. Ms. Moncure is working with Timeless TV to produce 30-minute videos, to be updated periodically, highlighting tourism destinations, shopping, lodging and restaurants. The company is asking that they be aired at consistent times during the week.

Ms. Moncure played a sample video, and passed out copies to commission members.

Members' concerns included:

Will businesses featured be charged an advertising fee?

(Response: no, the producers expect sponsorships like on PBS).

Will the videos differ, depending on content?

(Response: yes, with different narrators, styles based on subject)

Is Timeless TV a for-profit?

(Response: yes, it is a separate corporation)

Want to limit the number of hours the videos can run, and need to be sure they do not interfere with airing of County meetings.

(Response: the goal is three hours of programming per day, and will be scheduled around government programs)

Will the County be able to stop airing of the videos at any time?

(Response: Stafford will have a contract with Timeless TV including a clause that programs will end after a certain number of days' upon notice from the County)

Commission members requested that Ms. Moncure invite Mr. Jeff Campbell with Timeless TV to attend the February 2009 meeting and provide a draft of the plan, including:

Percentage of historical content versus advertising.

Assurance that Stafford sites like Chatham, Ferry Farm and Belmont will be featured.

How information about restaurants in Stafford will be balanced with those in other jurisdictions. Submit a written proposal for their review.

Ms. Moncure said that Mr. Campbell will attend the meeting. She also told members that although other jurisdictions have already been approached about the programming, it looks as though Stafford will be the first to air the videos, and would therefore probably have significant input about the sites that will be featured.

VIII. Agenda Additions

There were no additions to the agenda.

IX. New Business

Revision of Commission Charter

Mr. Kimbrell moved to adopt the revised charger that was drafted by Mr. Lottes; Mr. Sullivan seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

Broadband

Mr. Hill talked about pending broadband legislation in the Virginia General Assembly in which Stafford County is included. He said that the Department of Information Technology could potentially build a wireless network among County facilities, and sell any extra broadband width to a third party.

Mr. Kimbrell said there is a lot of money in the House bill for broadband, but that the language and funding is earmarked for the more rural areas in the state. He said Richmond conducted a statewide survey about broadband needs to which only 15 localities responded that their commercial interests did not have adequate broadband access. He also told the commission that the state will make more broadband coverage maps available as they are finished.

Ms. Schuler said there may be another map coming out soon including information from Comcast identifying households that have service. Mr. Hill asked if the County could have a copy, to which she replied “no” due to confidentiality issues – Stafford will have to wait until the state decides how to share the information.

Ms. Knight said the commission needs to continue working to offer Wi-Fi to underserved areas. She suggested asking Commissioner of the Revenue Scott Mayausky and Treasurer Laura Rudy to include a survey asking residents if they want/need the service in tax bills. Mr. Kimbrell said he will draft the survey.

V. Adjournment

At 8:55 p.m., Ms. Davis moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Knight seconded the motion; it passed unanimously.