

The Beaufort County Board of Commissioners held a special called meeting on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, at 5:30 PM, in the boardroom located at 136 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> St, Washington, NC with the following present:

**Commissioners:**

Chairman Frankie Waters  
Vice-Chairman Jerry Langley  
Commissioner Ed Booth  
Commissioner Stan Deatherage  
Commissioner John Rebholz  
Commissioner Hood Richardson  
Commissioner Randy Walker

**Staff Present:**

Brain Alligood, County Manager  
Katie Mosher, Clerk to the Board  
David Francisco, County Attorney  
Anita Radcliffe, Chief Financial Officer

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**GREAT Grant Applicants**

Chairman Waters called the meeting to order.

**Motion:** Vice-Chairman Langley motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Rebholz seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Ms. Mosher then read the Board into closed session.

**Motion:** Vice-Chairman Langley motioned to go into closed session. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

**Motion:** Commissioner Booth motioned to come out of closed session. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Brian Alligood said in closed session heard proposals from two telecommunication providers and again, to reiterate, that was in closed session because the maps and the information they were providing to you are considered trade secrets under the general statutes so that is protected information, so it is not public information at this time. He said under that you've received two proposals and we'll start with the first one and that proposal is from Charter Communications doing business as Spectrum Southeast LLC through its manager, Charter Communications. He said they are asking that the County partner with them on a GREAT Grant application and in that they would provide broadband fiber to the home for 1,129 locations at a cost to them of \$6.7 million and they are asking the County to participate in that if they are awarded the grant by the state, in the amount of \$150,000. He said that \$150,000 would come out of your ARPA funds that you've set aside for broadband. He said Charter is also the winner of the RDOF funds, the RDOF auction, to provide service in certain areas and they intend to leverage that with the GREAT Grant to provide additional coverage. He said you have in front of you a memorandum of understanding with Spectrum that lays all that out. He said you also have a resolution that supports the application to the GREAT Grant and our recommendation to you would be that you support them.

**Motion:** Commissioner Rebholz motioned to approve the memorandum of understanding and resolution of support for Spectrum Southeast LLC. Vice-Chairman Langley seconded.

Commissioner Richardson said by way of information, and I'm going to have a statement at the end of this, a request for the Board, as far as the public is concerned, this is a project. He said this is another one of those great projects that the federal government comes out with that is using federal funds to provide services to people in areas that can't be justified in normal

Special Called Meeting - Tuesday, April 26, 2022  
GREAT Grant

commerce to provide a subsidy. He said this is really a subsidy that is being provided. He said in most cases in areas that I've seen, and I'm as familiar with Beaufort County as anybody in this room, they're not very many people in the areas that service is being provided to and that's why there's not lines out there now. He said then the federal government has a program for providing a discounted monthly fee to certain people for this. He said the good news is this is being run just like the federal government is run, we're taking federal funds and passing them through the state of North Carolina and making federal grants and then we're taking federal funds that are given to the counties to pay our part of the match. He said what could possibly go wrong on something that is very bad business deal that none of the companies that are involved in this will do on their own. He said because they could get financing if it was just based on economics, so I'm opposed to this. He said I was talking to a person; I did some business for a person in South Creek here in Beaufort County two weeks ago and I asked the gentlemen what he did for a living, and he said I'm a computer programmer. He said I said wait a minute, you're moving from Connecticut to the village of South Creek to work as a computer programmer and he said yeah, I can get everything I need here to do my computer work, already now. He said so this is a program that satellite technology is very rapidly overtaking. He said one of the questions that I would like to have answered is there a law that requires these companies to keep these lines active and in service, even though they don't have subscribers on them.

Commissioner Rebholz said there is, but I don't remember what the timeframe was, but it was a substantial timeframe.

Commissioner Richardson said they have to keep those lines whether they have customers or not because from my knowledge of Beaufort County most of the people in the area that are being served by these lines, they don't want internet anyway or they'd already have it. He said they're not going out and spending \$500 or \$600 for a computer and a lot of them don't have it so it's a bad idea. He said now, here's the big deal in this thing. He said I want to be relieved of my obligation to vote on this because Charter/Spectrum, I do some work for them.

Chairman Waters said to exclude Commissioner Richardson we need a motion to exclude.

**Motion:** Commissioner Booth motioned to excuse Commissioner Richardson from voting on this. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Deatherage said Commissioner Richardson makes some salient points. He said while I agree with what you're saying I wish like heck we could use some of that ARPA money for solid waste and restart recycling, which is near and dear to my heart but we're going down the road where we need to look at providing as much internet to the County as possible. He said the question becomes what's the best way to do it. He said already the private sector is moving in directions that some of us don't even know anything about yet. He said we see in the Ukraine war Starlink making tremendous gains in providing a benefit to the Ukrainian soldiers and have created a parody situation with the Russians and if they can do that there, satellite might be the answer for these rural areas of America at far less cost than what we're going to be paying to install hardware backbone, hyperlink that's still going to cost more money to get to the households. He said that being said, this money is available. He said I am betwixt and between on this one. He said I will vote for it but understanding it is my second choice, maybe third, maybe last choice if we could get satellite but that's not really available yet but it could be by the time this is ready.

Chairman Waters said I'll just make one comment. He said I've had fiber to my home through RiverStreet for a number of years and I live just about as far out in a rural area as possible. He said people want it and we're looking at 1,129 and in addition to that, this is economic development. He said we're opening up the opportunity for other people to move into the area that can work from their home so it's a good investment, it's economic development and I support this.

Commissioner Walker said I see this as at the turn of the century we built highways and not everyone had a car so we're building a highway for the future, and this just opens up Beaufort County. He said we can take it any way we can get it. He said Starlink satellites, just last night, flew over the area. He said you could go out and see them so yes, that's available and if that becomes the way to do it, you know, that's the way we should do it but to have it in the ground, that's important to so I'm definitely for this and I hope everyone else is too.

Commissioner Deatherage said I'd like to remind the Board and the people of Beaufort County that all this money that is being given to us is free money is causing this inflationary situation we're in. He said it's getting worse by the day. He said too much money chasing too few goods. He said it's a bad idea to begin with, we're just in for the ride right now. He said I'm voting to continue the ride but it's not the best idea for this nation, maybe not for the County.

**Motion Restated:** Commissioner Rebholz motioned to approve the memorandum of understanding and resolution of support for Spectrum Southeast LLC. Vice-Chairman Langley seconded. The vote was unanimous. (6-0)

Mr. Alligood said the second proposal you had was from Connect Holdings, DBA Bright Speed. He said they have proposed a GREAT Grant application that they're asking the County to partner on. He said their application would serve approximately 1933 locations, bringing fiber to the premises. He said they're showing the total cost for the project would be \$6.5 million and they're asking for the Board to partner with them in the amount of \$500,000 on this project. He said those funds, again, would come from funds you received through ARPA that you put aside for broadband infrastructure. He said you have a copy the resolution that supports that. He said you also have a copy of their memorandum of understanding that has to be submitted with the project and we would recommend your approval of this one as well.

**Motion:** Vice-Chairman Langley motioned to approve the resolution and the memorandum of understanding. Commissioner Booth seconded. The vote was unanimous. (6 - 0)

Chairman Waters then asked for a vote.

Commissioner Richardson said I was excluded because of the conflict of interest. He said I certainly couldn't be expected to vote for their competitor, that would be a conflict also.

Mr. Alligood said just asking, from the attorney side, you need to have a vote to excuse Commissioner Richardson from this one as well since you did it for the other one just so you're consistent.

Commissioner Richardson said I thought I was excluded from both of them.

Chairman Waters said by consensus the motion was for both.

**Motion:** Chairman Waters motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Booth seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kathleen Mosher, CMC, NCCCC  
Clerk to the Board