

**MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
430 HELIX ROAD
GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2022**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Buddy Agan, Diane Anderson, Jackie Brown, John Calhoun, Dean Campbell, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Otis Grier Jr., Charles Jennings, Wes McAllister, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Willie Neal Norman, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Don Smoak, Albert Talbert, Faye Thomas and David Tribble.

MEMBERS ABSENT: John Carter, Edith Childs, Ken Durham, Charlie Henry, Amelia Herlong, Shirley Jenkins, Theo Lane, Sen. Shane Massey, Miliken Matthews, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Rep. Anne Parks, David Sawyer, Roy Smith Jr., Melissa Spencer, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Ann Skinner, Rick Green, David Hays.

GUESTS PRESENT: Jeff Wilson, CEO, Western Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative; Stephen Taylor, Western Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative; Sen. Billy Garrett.

<p>Call to Order</p>	<p>Meeting was held in person with the option to attend via conference call. Chairman Willie Neal Norman gave invocation and called the meeting to order.</p> <p>The April 25, 2022, minutes were approved unanimously.</p> <p>Norman recognized guests Sen. Billy Garrett; Jeff Wilson and Stephen Taylor from Western Carolina Telephone Cooperative.</p>
<p>Guest Presentation: Western Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative</p>	<p>Western Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative CEO Jeff Wilson gave Board members an update on broadband activities in the Upper Savannah Region.</p> <p>Wilson recognized the late John McAllister, former long-time Upper Savannah Board member and chairman who founded the Western Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative in 1952. "We have John McAllister in our DNA. That is about caring for our community and serving," Wilson said. People in rural McCormick, Abbeville, Iva and Starr did not have telephone service until the Cooperative was established thanks to McAllister and Rural Electrification Administration low-interest federal loans, Wilson said.</p> <p>Wilson said the Cooperative is owned and governed "by those that we serve," with everything earned invested back into the Cooperative and into its members. The Cooperative began as a telephone company but has expanded to fiber optic internet service, cyber security, camera surveillance and TV services. The Cooperative's service area has expanded into Greenwood and Newberry counties, and the City of Newberry has a fiber optic network throughout its city.</p> <p>Wilson said the Cooperative had approximately 9,500 internet customers in 2015, with more than 30,000 internet customers today. He said \$50 million has</p>

	<p>been invested in Greenwood County and that it will require an additional \$52 million to finish covering the County with its fiber optic network. It costs \$75,000 per mile to install fiber optic, he said.</p> <p>Wilson said fiber is superior to copper and is extremely reliable. He said households that have 25 megabits per second download internet speed and three megabits upload speed are considered unserved and that there are approximately 181,000 addresses in South Carolina that are unserved. Wilson said there are \$500 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding available for internet providers and that Western Carolina is applying for some of the funding to help the unserved.</p> <p>Wilson said the Affordable Connectivity Program gives low-income households a discounted broadband subscription, if they are eligible for SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, school lunch programs, SSI, public housing assistance, veteran's pension or survivor's benefit. Stephen Taylor, who assisted Wilson with the presentation, said more people need to take advantage of the program and might not be aware. Wilson said there is also a \$100 credit available toward internet devices. Wilson said he will promote the program no matter who the household's ISP might be.</p> <p>Wilson said computer literacy classes on how to connect to the internet, how to stream TV programs and movies, etc., are available as one of WCTEL's services. Also, veterans can connect to healthcare and telemedicine without having to travel to Columbia or Augusta, etc., to VA facilities.</p> <p>Sen. Garrett was complimentary of the veteran's program and urged Upper Savannah Board members to support WCTEL in its efforts to acquire more funding.</p> <p>Grier asked Wilson about the availability of Wi-Fi hot spots for underserved communities, particularly to help school-aged children. Wilson said there are approximately 28 such hot spots available.</p> <p>Wes McAllister said, "we are stronger together than separate." He said connectivity changes lives and that people who live in rural South Carolina deserve the same connectivity to technology.</p> <p>Norman said the Promised Land community in Greenwood County is underserved with internet. Garrett urged members of the Promised Land community to contact VisionGreenwood about connectivity issues and to report their internet download speeds.</p>
<p>Transportation: Consideration of approval for Section 5310 rural and small urban van applications</p>	<p>Government Services Director Rick Green presented the SCDOT Public Transit 5310 Application Rankings to the Board. Regional rankings are submitted to the SCDOT Commission for final review and possible funding. Transit providers annually apply for van funding to serve seniors and persons with disabilities and Upper Savannah staff ranks their requests.</p> <p>The rankings are No. 1, Piedmont Agency on Aging hopes to replace a van</p>

	<p>which has 264,000 miles and is used in all four counties in its service area of Abbeville, Greenwood, Laurens and Saluda counties; No. 2, Laurens County Disabilities and Special Needs Board hopes to replace a van which has a wheelchair lift that is not working properly; and No. 3, McCormick Area Transit (MAT) has applied for vans to be used in McCormick and Greenwood counties and also in Abbeville County once its transit program expands there. The rankings were approved unanimously.</p> <p>Albert Talbert asked Green for an update on intersection improvements at Highway 378 and Callison Highway in Edgefield County that have been funded through the SCDOT Safety Program. Green said the intersection is flagged meaning surveying has begun, but he has no project construction start-up date.</p> <p>Otis Grier Jr. asked for an update on ridership with MAT transit in the City of Greenwood for medical, pharmacy and essential shopping. Green said approximately 150 people ride the vans per month and that the MAT/Greenwood County partnership hopes to expand further into the County.</p>
<p>Workforce: Presentation of WSPA Workforce Video</p>	<p>Workforce Development Director Ann Skinner announced that USCOG workforce development staff successfully applied for a Duke Energy grant to provide job seekers who lack reliable transportation with free round trips to the Greenwood County SC Works Center. Job seekers can call ahead to SC Works to request a ride in advance on McCormick Area Transit vans. Skinner showed the Board a video of WSPA Channel 7's news report on the SC Works agreement with Greenwood County.</p> <p>The Greenwood County Economic Development director told WSPA that more than 600 jobs will be added in the next few years and that lack of transportation has hindered some job seekers from applying for these potential jobs.</p> <p>Skinner said she hopes free rides can eventually be provided to SC Works Centers in other counties in the Upper Savannah Region.</p>
<p>Presentation of FY2023 Budget and Annual Board Resolution on Select Operating Policies</p>	<p>Assistant Director Sam Leaman presented the FY 2023 Budget. The operating budget increased 22 percent, and the total budget increased 19 percent. The operating budget is \$4,078,556 and the total budget \$7,148,534.</p> <p>Leaman reported that the State Aid to COGs has increased from \$40,965 last year to \$171,025 thanks to SC COG directors working with key legislators to restore COG recurring funds back to pre-2008 levels. The recurring funds are distributed to the COG regions by formula, providing Upper Savannah with an additional \$30,060. An additional \$1 million in non-recurring funding was appropriated in the state budget to be divided evenly among the 10 COGs, providing Upper Savannah an additional \$100,000.</p> <p>County dues decreased slightly due to a decline in population, likely the result of Census 2020 data collection challenges with the pandemic. The biggest change on the revenue side of the budget was Economic Development Administration decreasing from \$270,000 in FY 22 to \$80,000 due to the EDA CARES Act</p>

	<p>Planning Grant expiring June 30, 2022. The Revolving Loan Fund decreased slightly. SCDOT increased its funding of the COGs planning and mass transit programs. The budget includes CARES Act CDBG-CV funding for four projects in the region including home-delivered meals, HVAC at Abbeville Civic Center, air purifiers in Laurens District 55 schools, and transportation in Saluda County. The state provided funds to the Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) so that the 10 COGs could provide technical assistance to applicants seeking funds in the ARPA SCIIP Program. Workforce Development revenues have increased 60 percent due to direct grants from the U.S. Department of Labor, Aging revenues increased 26 percent, and Community Development funding remained about the same with several new projects in the pipeline.</p> <p>On the expense side of the budget, employee salaries and fringe benefits totaled approximately half of the \$4 million in the budget. The budget included a 3 percent cost of living salary increase for eligible employees. Though the rest of the expenses remain mostly the same, there is an increase in transportation costs due to rising gas prices.</p> <p>Having been previously approved by the Executive Committee, the budget was approved unanimously by the full board.</p> <p>Leaman then presented the Annual Board Resolution of Select Operating Policies for July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023, proposing that the reimbursement rates for the use of a personal vehicle would increase to 54 cents per mile. An increase in the level of expenditure that can be approved without competition from \$2,500 to \$5,000 was also proposed. Any purchases over \$5,000 will require a solicitation for competition. Having been previously approved by the Executive Committee, the resolution was approved unanimously by the full board.</p>
<p>Nominating Committee Report</p>	<p>Wes McAllister presented the Nominating Committee's recommendation for COG officers for the July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2024 term. The Committee includes Chairman Floyd Nicholson, Diane Anderson and McAllister. The Committee recommended Albert Talbert of Edgefield County as chairman, Charles Jennings of McCormick County as vice chairman, and Patricia Hartung as Secretary-Treasurer. The Board unanimously passed the recommendations.</p>
<p>Director's Report</p>	<p>Hartung expressed gratitude to the State Legislature for restoring the State Aid to COGs to 2008 levels and the additional \$1 million which will be split evenly among the 10 COGs. Budget Director for the Senate Finance Committee Mike Shealy said the COGs were one of the only organizations since 2008 not to have their budgets restored. She said USCOG uses the funds to match federal grants.</p> <p>Hartung said the State Legislature passed a resolution to provide each of the state's COGs \$500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to assist water and sewer providers in each region. Hartung said the COGs do not yet know their responsibilities. She said ARPA SCIIP Program funding will be available to water and sewer providers who can contact Leaman, Green or Cason Wright on USCOG's staff for technical assistance in the online applications.</p>

	Hartung requested that Board members read over the activity reports that were provided and contact any staff member if they have questions.
Passing the Gavel	Norman officially passed the chairman's gavel to Talbert, who will preside over the Board meeting in August 2022. Hartung presented a plaque to Norman, honoring him for his service as Board Chairman.
Adjourn	Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director