

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

DATE: **NOVEMBER 26, 2007**

Committee Members Present:

Supervisors Monroe
Stec
Mason
Champagne
F. Thomas
Girard
Sokol

Others Present:

Representing Warren County Economic
Development Corporation:
Leonard Fosbrook, President
Elaine Belmer, Office Manager
JoAnn McKinstry, Deputy Commissioner of
Administrative & Fiscal Services
Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board
Patricia Tatich, Director, Planning &
Community Development
Rob Metthe, Director, Information Technology
Supervisor Caimano
David Strainer, Supervisor Elect, Town of
Queensbury
Debra L. Schreiber, Legislative Office
Specialist

Mr. Monroe called the Economic Development Committee meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Sokol, seconded by Mr. Mason, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the October 29, 2007 meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Leonard Fosbrook, President, Economic Development Corporation, who distributed copies of his agenda packet to members of the Committee, *a copy of which is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing with the first item on the agenda, Mr. Fosbrook announced the macadam road into the Queensbury Industrial Park (QIP) had been installed and the National Guard had completed the clearing of the property. He expounded that Warren County now had their first industrial park to recruit businesses.

With respect to the second item on the agenda, Mr. Fosbrook informed the Committee he had been contacted by Howard Lowe, Project Director, State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh, relative to developing a community broadband network in Clinton, Essex and Franklin Counties. According to Mr. Lowe, he said, significant funding had been made available by the Federal Government that would bring broadband infrastructure to rural areas. Furthermore, he stated, this coalition had established a proposed model of operations should they be successful in the installation of broadband services. In discussions with Terry Martino, Executive Director, Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), Joe Starks from ECC (Educational, Corporate & Community) Technologies, and Mr. Lowe, Mr. Monroe commented there were two different entities seeking to expand broadband services throughout Warren County.

Rob Metthe, Information Technology Director, apprised that he attended the ECC Technologies and CBN Connect meetings and both companies reviewed their proposals for the County. While each entity offered their own approach and the costs associated with their proposal, Mr. Metthe recommended the County apply for a Smart Growth grant so a feasibility study could be performed to determine the benefits of implementing broadband services by either company. At the previous Board Meeting, Mr. Monroe explained it was his understanding the full Board of Supervisors authorized the Planning & Community Development Department to apply for the Smart Growth grant; request that an analysis be performed; and review alternative approaches for broadband services. Pursuant to Phase 1 of this project, Mr. Fosbrook indicated a rural health care grant had recently been awarded while Phase 2, which included Glens Falls Hospital and Hudson Headwaters Health Network, would allow doctors and health care facilities to share patient information and perform on-line consultations. When he discussed this information with Trip Shannon of Hudson Headwaters Health Network and a member of the CBN Connect Board of Directors, he said, Mr. Shannon expressed his enthusiasm that Warren County become involved in the project.

Mr. Stec and Ms. Tatich entered the meeting at 10:26 a.m.

From an economical standpoint, Mr. Fosbrook commented, the installation of broadband services were absolutely critical to businesses and tourism, and would ultimately facilitate cell phone coverage in the Adirondacks.

Mr. Caimano exited the meeting and Mr. Champagne entered at 10:27 a.m.

Ms. Tatich asked whether other counties had expressed the need for broadband access in their communities and Mr. Monroe responded that Hamilton County suggested they would be interested in partnering with another county for such services. He stated the Smart Growth grant would determine the needs and benefits derived by County residents which would ultimately lead to an RFP (request for proposal). In response to an inquiry by Ms. Tatich relative to a County administrative commitment for this project, Mr. Fosbrook explained the Smart Growth grant was discussed with CBN Connect, and they estimated the County would expend between \$40,000 and \$50,000; a needs analysis would be required, as well as an explanation from the engineer regarding the various programs being offered. In addition, he said, there would be a significant amount of County involvement from the Information Technology Department, Planning & Community Development Department and the Economic Development Corporation. Mr. Fosbrook noted there had been some discussion about setting up a not-for-profit authority to install the broadband infrastructure and lease it to area providers.

In response to an inquiry by Ms. Tatich, Mr. Fosbrook said he suspected the expenditures to be significant over time and according to CBN Connect, they already received \$1 million in grant funds due to the need for these services. He said both the State and Federal Government were making these funds available because they recognized the demand for broadband coverage. He further stated that Mr. Lowe estimated the total cost of this project to be approximately \$15 million but expected a majority of the funds to be obtained by grants. Ms. Tatich asked whether there were previous RFP's or applications that could be obtained

to assist their Department in completing the Smart Growth application. Mr. Metthe replied that he had seen a sample study, and thought perhaps other counties might be willing to share their information.

In the Adirondacks, Mr. Monroe apprised that many resourced-based companies had sold their businesses and property due to the lack of broadband services and he felt the installation of this service would allow children and adults in this region the same opportunities as those individuals living elsewhere. While this may not be considered economic development, he said, there was certainly the need for the technology. Mr. Mason asked whether the physical characteristics of the broadband consisted of towers or fiber optic cables and Mr. Fosbrook replied their proposal suggested both, wireless and hard line. Ms. Tatich stated she had done some research and queried whether WiFi would be replaced with WiMax and Mr. Metthe said it was his understanding a fiber backbone would be installed with wireless being utilized on an "as needed" basis. He further explained that it would depend on the services being offered by the provider; however, he said, neither entity could do it without the other.

Mr. Fosbrook emphasized the importance of the public/private partnership. Mr. Monroe indicated that the internet service was not regulated by the cable commission and unless a public/private partnership were formed, he said, it was his belief that many areas would remain without broadband access. Mr. Fosbrook commented the installation of broadband service in the Adirondacks would be similar to the Federal program that installed phone service in rural areas years ago. Mr. Monroe stated the opportunity had now come for Warren County to apply for this Smart Growth Grant, as it required no local match.

Ms. Tatich asked if the monthly internet service cost was comparable to Roadrunner and Mr. Metthe responded ultimately the increase in the customer base would reduce the service cost. He said Ontario County was working in conjunction with a service provider and their Local Development Corporation (LDC) to install broadband service in the areas that did not have service, thereby reducing costs as they were performing the work themselves. He apprised that Ontario County had received enough grant assistance to make their financial commitments and had commenced their construction phase. Ms. Tatich said she would seek input from the Director of Planning for Ontario County to assist her office in the preparation of the Smart Growth grant application.

Mr. Fosbrook apprised that many of the local Legislators were either involved or had knowledge of this project and supported the community network for broadband services. On the other hand, he said, there were numerous factors to consider should the County decide to install these services on their own. At a recent meeting that included Senator Schumer, Mr. Monroe said they encouraged the health care community to join Warren County or vice-versa, rather than trying to obtain these services on their own.

Mr. Monroe commented if there were any advantages to partnering with another County in this project, the decision must be made soon as the Smart Growth grant application deadline was December 28, 2007. If Warren County chose to partner with another county, Ms. Tatich suggested the responsibilities of each county be specifically defined. Mr. Fosbrook replied that this "project" was still in the informational stages and that CBN Connect ultimately made the decisions.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Fosbrook, Ms. Tatich explained the Legislature had already appropriated the funds for the Smart Growth grants and expected the monies to be awarded fairly soon thereafter. Mr. Fosbrook said he was attempting to meet with Mr. Lowe and their project manager and he would make inquiry whether it was in their best interest to apply for a joint grant with Hamilton County. Mr. Metthe added that if the Committee made some sort of commitment, such as joining another County, that recommendation could be made part of the study.

There being no further business to come before the committee, on motion by Mr. Champagne and seconded by Mr. Mason, Mr. Monroe adjourned the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra L. Schreiber
Legislative Office Specialist