Economic Development Advisory Board
August 3, 2021, Meeting Minutes

I. Call to order

Chair Chuck Goad called to order the regular meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Board at 3:30 PM on August 3, 2021, at Memorial Hall and via conference call.

II. Roll call

The following members were present:

Chair Chuck Goad (14-0)
Vice-Chair Wayne Stephany (14-0)
Paul Yaroslaski (11-3)
Lori Kelley (12-2)
Jason Curtis (13-1)
Tony Royse (13-1)
Lisa Wilson (Ex-Officio)
Tabitha Snodgrass (Ex-Officio)
April Nutt (Ex-Officio)

The following members were absent:

Brian Hight (4-3)

The following staff were present:

Kelly Passauer, City Manager
David Cowan, Assistant City Manager
Finance Director Lacey Lies
Administrative Aide Lydia Collins

The following visitors were present:

Jim Kelly
Zach Cole – Kansas Fiber
Tiernan Good – Kansas Fiber
John Shull – AT&T (via phone)
David Suckow - Sparklight
Jim Duck - Sparklight

III. Approval of Minutes from July 6, 2021

A motion was made by Wayne Stephany to approve the minutes from the July 6, 2021, meeting, which was seconded by Lori Kelley. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Items Requiring Action

A. Discuss findings from Data Analytics' Committee.
   a. Lori Kelley said one of the things they did is to improve their Google presence, correcting any errors and put the focus on attractions, points of interest, retailers and restaurants. The group is going to have a training program, three half-days with training and practical use. The first day would be for beginners, the second day for intermediate and the third day for experts, all at the Fab Lab. They are working with Red Lodging who was recommended to us by Kansas Main Street. He charges $2,500 per day and would give a proposal of different options. He thought he could do 3 days for $5,000. After that they will help with Yelp reviews. The group is working on getting this done before Neewollah.

      Lacey Lies said there will be a cost to the classes, $20 per day or all three days $50. Lacey Lies said they have an invitation list and may stick to that.

      Kelly Passauer asked if it could be recorded.

B. Amendments to the Neighborhood Exterior Grant Program.
   a. Lacey Lies said we discussed the intent of the program and one of the intents is to improve the housing stock. We thought maybe it was too restrictive and so we got the rating system from the county. Average Minus (A-) is about 54% of the area and this classification shows there is some deterioration. The houses are identified by a code. This way we are picking houses that have been identified by professionals. The recommendation is to be within the program area, be less than $100,000 or be an Average Minus (A-). Any properties within the flood zone are excluded.

      Chuck Goad moved for this to be recommended to the Commission. Paul Yaroslaski seconded. Motion carried.

V. Items for Discussion

A. Presentation from internet companies.
   a. Sparklight – Jim Duck, David Suckow. We provide broadband to residential and small businesses – extended fiber network with plans to expand. The dedicated access for customers helps with networks like hospitals. Small to medium

businesses are provided broadband and telephone. We want to work hand-in-hand with onsite and remote users.

Chuck Goad asked about accommodating remote workers with bandwidth and speed.

Jim Duck said they offer five levels of service. The gigabyte service is fiber deep, coaxial, and we offer it now. If they are not in the right package they will have up and down service. We offer the top packages in residential.

Chuck Goad asked if the worker has problems with operating remotely is it because they have the wrong package.

Jim Duck said yes that they need the right equipment in their homes, too.

Lacey Lies said she doesn't have their services where she lives.

Jim Duck said to call, and they can do a feasibility service.

Lisa Wilson said a lot of the school children live outside the area and have trouble with remote learning. The Fruitland area is outside the area and would be a good study.

Chuck Goad asked what the process is to seek out potential areas.

Jim Duck said getting to the area is the biggest hurdle. They rely on cities to provide areas of interest. All it takes is a phone call.

Lori Kelley said she called Sparklight to ask about this and was told that it was fine the way it was, and they did not want to expand their services.

April Nutt asked if there was any new development within the city and do you already have the equipment for that.

Jim Duck said yes that is in the franchise agreement.

Chuck Goad asked April if, when she has a project, does she let them know.

April Nutt said yes, they let the utilities know.

Jim Duck said IP TV will be the next wave, there will not be any more cable boxes on televisions.

Kelly Passauer asked about local channels and what we can do to get them to us. What can the citizens do to modify that?

Jim Duck said to start the discussion with local representatives because it is a federal decision as to the DMA.

Chuck Goad asked why the DMA is different.

Jim Duck said they have had to eliminate markets because of the restrictions. It is about market share.

Lacey Lies asked how the residential internet packages work. If every resident has a middle package and they are all watching the same thing at the same time, does it affect that?

Jim Duck said it should not, even if they have every electronic device on. They can call the helpline and it can be taken care of.

Chuck Goad asked about improving the internet plan, what would be Sparklight's involvement?

Jim Duck said all residential would go through him and business through Zach Cole.

Tabatha Snodgrass said several small businesses are doubling up on internet services because Sparklight goes down and is not reliable.

David Suckow said there are local technicians here and the business should call immediately so that they can figure out what is going on. I deal with dedicated services. Technology is not always what it should be and addressing problems as they come is the best way to deal with them.

Chuck Goad said that it is difficult to get help right away because a person is usually told it will be a few days before a tech can get there.

David Suckow said a business call should go out that day.

Jim Duck said business customers are handled immediately whereas residential customers may have to wait.

Lori Kelley asked what redundancy plans they have when everything goes down.

David Suckow said they are in the process of getting more set up. Emergency services should be set up on a dedicated service. The only way really to protect your business is to not put all your eggs in one basket. You need to protect your business and doubling up on your internet is a good insurance policy.

Chuck Goad asked if the City requires vendors to provide copies of what their disaster plans are.

Jim Duck said they go over their disaster plans yearly but do not provide them to their customers.

David Suckow said they do provide LTE services where if one service goes down the other service will automatically kick in.

Chuck Goad asked about the reliance on the internet and when it goes down people are dead in the water. Does your company foresee in the future to provide a plan for no disruption of service?

Jim Duck said there would be no way to guarantee service.

David Suckow said on the enterprise side yes, they have had those requests before and they can provide that to them.

Wayne Stephany said he usually loses his Wi-Fi a couple times a day, and asked if that was usual.

Jim Duck said no, it should be checked.

Paul Yaroslaski said when he was finally able to get ahold of a live person, he saw on social media that it was service-wide. Is there any number you can call to bypass that?

Jim Duck said no, there is not.

David Suckow said in 6 to 12 months they will have geographic redundancy set up.

Chuck Goad said when we get the maps, we can go over them and he asked Tabatha Snodgrass to let the businesses know what is going on.

John Shull with AT&T – Chuck Goad asked John to let the board know about their residential and business services.

John Shull said they have fiber underground in most of the city. In making sure people can work from home, they are trying to expand mobile coverage into Kansas by adding mobile towers and laying more fiber. The focus has been on the southern half and west half. We have satellite internet and rural access internet. Adoption has been low and once it picks up, they will look at expansion. There are a lot of cell towers in the area and as the technology evolves, we will expand into that.

Chuck Goad asked why the adoption is so low.

John Shull said AT&T was not doing a good job giving out the information.

Lacey lies asked about the speeds for that. The package available did not meet the demand.

John Shull said yes, where it is available is 6 pps which is sometimes adequate unless a lot of people are using it.

Chuck Goad asked if the more people that use it, the slower it becomes.

John Shull said yes, but the more people that use it, there is more of a chance for it to expand.

Chuck Goad asked how long it would take.

John Shull said three to six months.

Chuck Goad asked if a map could be provided of where the towers are.

John Shull said no, but he could send a map of coverage.

Chuck Goad asked if he could provide that.

Lacey Lies asked if he could provide a map for mobility and fiber too and expand the area a little bit outside Independence City limits so we could see the buffer.

John Shull said he could do it for the whole county.

Chuck Goad asked if people were not using the fiber already in the ground.

John Shull said yes, an engineer would need to go out there and if there are buildings with multiple tenants, they can get hooked up for each of them. We can go 1,000 feet in each direction.

Chuck Goad asked if John could provide a map of where that fiber is.

John Shull said he is 85% sure he can.

Lori Kelley asked if fiber is put throughout the City and an area is more than 1,000 feet from the main run, would that happen?

John Shull said an engineer would have to evaluate whether it is cost effective to go further than 1,000 feet.

Lori Kelley asked about speed ranges for different ways to connect to the internet.

John Shull said yes there are different tiers, 25, 50, 75, 100 and 150 for a gig.

Chuck Goad asked where the throttling takes place reducing the speed of the data.

John Shull said AT&T does not throttle back except in the case of a disaster. Emergency responder service has full capabilities in disaster issues. We can set it up where even their private phones are set up.

Chuck Goad asked about what the current plans are.

John Shull said Direct TV and satellite will not stay the same. Hopefully U-Verse will be coming back. DSL's are going away and ideally they want it based on the U-Verse capability.

Lori Kelley asked if John could include their redundancy plans.

Zach Cole – Kansas Fiber Network – We are different from the large companies, we are locally based. The investments we have are all in Kansas. We are a communication service provider. We are not residential providers, we are business only and focus on dedicated networks and all the things that go with that structure. With a dedicated network, your internet does not slow down when there are more people on it. We do partner with other local providers. When we built in Independence we helped with the incumbent services and kept the services higher.

Chuck asked Zach if he could provide a map.

Zach Cole said absolutely, I will send it to you along with how we can partner with the City.

Kelly Passauer asked if the customer has a home-based business would they qualify.

Zach Cole said the price points are higher for a dedicated network but if they can pay that then yes, we can set them up.

Chuck Goad asked Zach Cole if he could also provide his disaster recovery plans.

B. ARPA funding.
   a. American Rescue Plan Act. The funding objectives include health, water/sewer, premium pay for rescue workers, expanded broadband.

Lacey Lies said we could only be a support function because there is not enough money to be an incentive to bring a company in.

Chuck Goad said when we get the broadband going it could provide a role.

Lacey Lies said the City received 1.3 million dollars and need to allocate it to these purposes. The County received 6.2 million dollars also needing allocated to the same purposes. The City can petition the county for money to go towards improving the broadband. Lacey said she must submit a proposal to the County and she does not have anything concrete she can pitch to them. She is considering putting it in for consideration but nothing definite, maybe a county-wide plan for the investment.

Chuck Goad said once we get the maps, we can produce some numbers and a budget for the first phase and then go back and amend the proposal.

Lacey Lies asked if someone from the group could help her put this together by the end of this week.

Chuck Goad said he could work on it some on Thursday and some on Friday.

Lacey Lies said addressing negative economic impacts is pretty broad but the subcategory is impacted industries in the public sector, supporting small businesses, helping in hospitality sectors, and implementing economic relief programs. This also must be turned in by the end of the week. If our efforts are on hardest-hit families, we could target our efforts on the census tract. The water/sewer infrastructure for the West Laurel Industrial Park to get adequate lines to the manufacturing facilities and the Water Treatment Plant. April Nutt has a new housing development underway with $400,000 in infrastructure improvements needed.

C. Other items for discussion.
   a. ROZ Incentive – We are only qualified for relocation incentive for people moving to Kansas. We are not qualified for the student loan relief.

      Jim Kelly said that debt repayment does not fit in but could be set up where it could be put in. The county put in enough to fund 10 requests but we have had a list of about 60.

      Lisa Wilson asked if employers could participate.

      Jim Kelly said yes, on the loan repayment side.

      Lacey Lies said there must be some kind of money put forward from a county to be able to do this. We are specifically precluded from it.

      Chuck Goad moved to create a letter by City staff for the use of the funds. Tony Royse seconded. Motion carried.

      Jim Kelly said on the proposal we put in money to assist the county to get back into the ROZ program. If they put up $750 MAC would put up $750. We also put in for the ROZ program to be brought back and to open up more involvement. The ROZ program says for student loan debt repayment the student needs to stay in Montgomery County.

VI. Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn by Paul Yaroslaski, seconded by Tony Royse. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes approved by:

Chuck Goad, Chair

Wayne Stephany, Vice Chair