

# Broadband boost — and reservations

## FUNDING

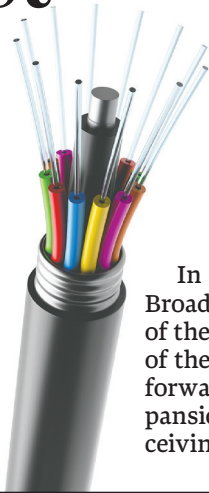
### PATH Foundation awards county \$1 million for universal service

BY BEN PETERS | *Rappahannock News Staff*

The Rappahannock County Broadband Authority on Monday secured a \$1 million grant from the Warrenton-based philanthropic PATH Foundation to bring universal broadband to Rappahannock County.

With additional federal stimulus dollars on the way, the grant could significantly reduce the county's financial burden for the universal broadband project it's

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## SUPERVISORS

### Frazier, Smith hesitate as late-stage negotiations approach

BY JULIA SHANAHAN | *Rappahannock News Staff*

In the Rappahannock County Broadband Authority's first meeting of the year on Monday, some members of the body appeared hesitant to move forward with a major broadband expansion project, despite the county receiving more than \$4 million in private

grants to help fund it.

The body has been barreling for months toward entering into a binding agreement with private internet provider All Points Broadband to bring

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## SUPERVISORS

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universal service to the county. But the terms of that agreement and how the project might be financed have left some members of the authority on edge.

Jackson District Supervisor and authority member Ron Frazier said he's concerned about the timeline of the All Points Broadband project, arguing there are immediate issues with unreliable phone and internet service in Rappahannock County and the contract the body may sign with All Points would preclude officials from seeking services from telecommunication companies to address those issues.

Frazier, who had in the past voted against moving forward with the broadband project, argued that the county can't afford to wait another 36 months for the construction of a universal fiber network to address poor cellular service. He pointed to the recent winter storm that shut down power in parts of the county for almost a week earlier this month, leaving many without phone service or the ability to call 911 in the event of an emergency.

"We should bring (All Points CEO Jimmy) Carr or one of his spokesmen back in here and ask if there's anything we can do in the interim ... we can't just hope no one has chest pains in the next two or three years," Frazier said, referring to people having health problems and being unable to call for help.

Hampton Supervisor and authority member Keir Whitson told Frazier that

**TO WATCH** this week's Broadband Authority meeting, and other local government meetings, go to [rappnews.com/video](http://rappnews.com/video)

he didn't understand his "leap of logic," telling Frazier it sounds like he's saying we should "do nothing with fiber-to-the-home to do something else that obviously hasn't worked in decades in Rappahannock County, which is universal cell or wireless communication infrastructure."

"Ron Frazier has been on the Board of Supervisors for two decades, and why is it suddenly urgent that we think of some overnight solution on cell phone coverage?" Whitson said in an interview.

Whitson said the purpose of pursuing a project with All Points is so the county has a hardened fiber infrastructure. To serve people in the meantime, the fire and rescue companies have pager systems, Piedmont Broadband is able to serve residents who have a line of sight to towers and people have landline phone systems to get them through this period, he said.

Frazier did not give any specific ideas of what could be done in the interim on cell phone coverage while All Points builds a fiber network, but said he wants to be able to ask Carr questions before moving forward with a contract.

"How can I be in favor of the project until my questions are answered?" Frazier wrote in an email. "How can I have thoughts about the APB contract, which the county will not be a party to, until my questions are answered? How can I assure my constituents that the project has proper management control until I

can review [Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission] management experience and proposed safeguards? How can I assure my constituents or any other county taxpayer that proper consumer protections are in place without having regulatory oversight in place? How can I explore interim solutions if I'm not allowed to work with other [internet service providers]?"

Piedmont Supervisor and authority member Christine Smith does not approve of the Board of Supervisors placing its eggs in one basket with the federal stimulus money going toward just the project, despite previously casting a vote in favor of reserving the money. At the time of her vote, Smith expressed the same concerns but chose to support the measure in hopes that it would bolster the fundraising efforts by demonstrating to potential donors the county's commitment to the project.

Smith also said she was concerned about the potential speed at which residents will be able to receive internet service once the fiber infrastructure is built and whether construction in some areas of the county will be prioritized over others. All Points has not released any specific construction plans at this point.

Smith, who had previously abstained from a vote on whether the county should move forward with the project, did not return a request for comment for this report.

"In my mind, even if it is three years to get a product, that is one and done, you're never going to have to change fiber unless it gets cut, and it gets repaired," Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Donehey said. "But in our lifetime, that fiber will be available forever for anybody that has it to their homes. Yes, I'd love it tomorrow. But I feel like we've waited a long time in this county, and to have the best product in two to three years makes it worth waiting for."

In December, Rappahannock County received a grant from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) as a part of a regional agreement with seven other counties to build a universal fiber-to-home broadband network to all unserved areas in the county with All Points.

The county will have to commit \$5.9 million of its own funds for the project and has already received a \$3.5 million donation from resident Chuck Akre, \$1 million from the PATH Foundation and the Board of Supervisors recently allocated more than \$715,000 in federal stimulus funds for the project. The county still has another \$715,000 in stimulus funds on the way, but the Board has not discussed how they will use it.

The authority and Board of Supervisors, comprised of the same membership, must now decide whether to enter into a binding agreement with All Points before fiber construction can begin. Donehey said conversations about the contract's details likely won't begin until February.

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weighing whether to enter.

The Board of Supervisors and Broadband Authority, which are comprised of the same membership, had been hedging their bets on obtaining funds from outside sources, such as local nonprofits, to help offset the nearly \$1.4 million the county would owe for the project while officials await taking a vote that will

determine if the county finalizes a contract with private provider All Points Broadband to bring universal internet to Rappahannock County.

Reception of the PATH grant is contingent on the Board of Supervisors entering into a contract with All Points, according to a letter from PATH President and CEO Christy Connolly that was addressed to Broadband Authority and Board of Supervisors Chair Debbie Donehey.

"Make no mistake. The PATH Foundation leadership is excited

about this opportunity for the citizens of Rappahannock County," Connolly said. "We have long been aware of the internet connectivity challenges that detract from the quality of life of Rappahannock residents and businesses."

She continued, "The lack of internet access has negative impacts on education and access to health care for residents of all ages. Elderly residents are deprived of an important technology that helps them remain connected rather than socially isolat-

ed. Many residents who would work from home cannot do so. Through this PATH grant, in combination with other funders, these challenges can be overcome in the near future."

In December, Rappahannock County was awarded a critical windfall of state funding from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) for the project. But to officially receive the money, the county must enter into the contract with All Points, and subsequently commit \$5.9 million of its own toward the project.

On top of the PATH grant, Rappahannock resident Chuck Akre committed \$3.5 million to help fund the county's portion, and the Board of Supervisors set aside more than \$715,000 in federal stimulus funding to go toward the project, should they choose to sign a contract.

The county will also receive about \$330,000 from the Rappahannock County Public Schools and is expected to receive another round of stimulus payments in March of more than \$700,000, \$300,000 of which would be enough to fund the county's end of the project without dipping into its reserves. The Board of Supervisors would have to approve allocating additional stimulus funds to the project.

"It's very touching to know that the PATH Foundation values the quality of life of our citizens and is willing to commit this large sum of money to make certain that funding will not stop the forward motion of fiber to the home in Rappahannock County," Donehey said.

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Rappahannock News

FOOTHILLS FORUM

# Supervisors kill resolution to back out of broadband project

BY JULIA SHANAHAN

*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors killed a resolution that could have pulled the county out of a regional universal broadband initiative after a tense, hour-long debate reflecting a split among the body.

Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier introduced the resolution, asking the body to withdraw from the regional agreement with private internet provider All Points Broadband and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) if they're unable to meet with project representatives by April 1. At their meeting on Monday, the board declined to vote on the measure.

# Man hang gliding in Park got caught in tree, closing Skyline Drive

BY BEN PETERS  
Rappahannock News staff

Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park closed for about an hour last Wednesday afternoon while fire and rescue teams worked to extract a hang glider who became trapped after accidentally flying into a tree.

The man, whose name park spokesperson Claire Comer declined to release, had taken off from the Dickey Ridge launch site in Warren County about 2 p.m. when he got caught in a downdraft and wound up in a tree overhanging the road. He was able to remove himself from the glider and move closer to the tree's trunk, which he safely cling to.

Park officials closed Skyline Drive, to bring in the Warren County Department of Fire and Rescue Services who helped safely extract him from the tree with a ladder truck. He was not found to be injured and Skyline Drive reopened around 2:45 p.m., Comer said.

The man had permits to lawfully hang glide and was not charged with any crimes, according to Comer.



Rescue crews extracted the uninjured pilot from a tree.

# Pilot dead after hang glider crash in Shenandoah Valley

Staff-Contributed

The Virginia State Police is investigating a fatal hang glider crash in Shenandoah County. The crash — the second involving a hang glider in the region this week — happened last Thursday at 3:07 p.m. about 30 miles southwest of Front Royal near Woodstock.

A preliminary investigation revealed that a hang-glider lost control and collided with a tree before it struck the ground, according to a State Police statement.

The pilot and sole occupant, Ward F. Odenwald, 71, of Woodbine, Maryland, died at the scene of the crash. His remains were transported to the Medical Examiner's Office in Manassas for an autopsy and examination.

No one on the ground was injured as a result of the crash.

The FAA was notified of the March 3 fatal crash, which remains under investigation.



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## BROADBAND

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While a massive effort to expand broadband in Rappahannock County is nearly completely funded with state grants, federal stimulus money and private donations, Frazier and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith said they're frustrated with the lack of communication from All Points and NSVRC about the finer details of the project. Frazier said he's tired of waiting multiple weeks for responses to questions and remains skeptical about the capability of All Points and NSVRC to complete a project of such a large scale.

While there is no reason to believe the organizations would be unable to complete the project if the county enters into a legally binding agreement with them, Frazier wants to ask representatives about that potential outcome. He also complained that he has not seen maps of where All Points plans to install fiber lines. His resolution demanded that if the Supervisors were able to meet with the All Points and NSVRC by April 1 that they send those maps to the Rappahannock County Broadband Authority by April 15.

"We don't know exactly how this is supposed to work," Frazier said last week of the contract process. "We don't know when we're going to get maps. We don't know what happens if there's any problems — who do we contact? We don't know that [NSVRC Executive Director] Brandon Davis and his staff are actually capable of handling a \$300 million build out. They won't even come down to talk to us."

Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey and Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney all opposed Frazier's resolution, saying more questions will be answered once the body receives a contract from All Points Broadband and NSVRC that's expected to outline the project's nuances.

"We're not going to sign a contract

that doesn't meet our expectations," Whitson said. "I can't edit a document if I don't have the document. I can't ask questions about a document if we don't have it under review."

Donehey argued the benefits of the broadband project for students, the economy and public safety "have been reiterated countless times, as has the fact that the costs of the project will not fall on our citizens."

"I am not prepared to reverse course and kill the deal for RPK at this point, and I don't think our BOS will do so, either," Donehey said. "If, for some reason, we are unable to negotiate a contract that works for our citizens, we will be able to withdraw before signing."

Frazier ultimately declined to put forward a motion to vote on the resolution, saying it was clear that the body's majority stood in opposition to the measure. He and Smith have both voiced concerns about the project with All Points Broadband and NSVRC since the body applied for broadband state funding last fall; Smith abstained from voting on the matter.

"If you needed work done at your home, and couldn't get someone to swing by and talk about the project, would you hire them?" Smith wrote in an email. "APB and NSVRC need to come to the table. We are a unique, rural county and can't count on a cookie-cutter solution."

Frazier's resolution stated that "the Rappahannock County Broadband Authority (RCBA) has been unsuccessful in scheduling meetings with either authorized representatives of the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) or All Points Broadband (APB) for the purpose of ascertaining answers to a significant number of questions the Authority and the citizens have concerning the 'Regional Initiative.'"

"I think it's aggressive," Carney said of the resolution. "And I think it's an unprecedented project, and I imagine that [All Points and NSVRC] are up to their ears in work."

About a dozen members of the public shared their opinions on the resolution during the public comment portion, showing mixed support for it.

"Maybe we should've had our feet more firmly on the ground before going after VATI," Smith said of the Board seeking state funds through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative to kickstart the project.

There is currently no timeline for when the Board can expect to see a contract, but the deadline for signing is May 5. Donehey said they could potentially ask for an extension on the deadline if they have lingering questions about the contract.

Donehey said she will contact Davis on when the body can potentially meet with him and request a project timeline. While the Supervisors invited All Points CEO Jimmy Carr and Davis to its Monday meeting, Donehey said neither attended.

"And that's what worries me is that we've got this looming deadline, and instead of it being this train running down a track and running smooth, it looks to me like it's headed to a train wreck if we don't extend that deadline so we can get all this information," Frazier said.

Smith suggested that Donehey send a letter to All Points and NSVRC, telling them that two members of the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors are frustrated with the lack of communication and are reluctant to move forward with the project. The three-member majority refused to send a letter, saying it could damage the county's credibility.

"There's no way on behalf of the 1,500 people that I represent that I'm going to ... agree to send any kind of message to the interested parties that we're conflicted on our board about this," Whitson said. "And whatever you do on your own, feel free, but I think it sends a really bad, damaging message that potentially undermines our credibility."

The Rappahannock News sent Davis Carr a list of broadband-related questions last week that were sourced from

county residents. Davis wrote in an email on Tuesday that it might be some time before they can respond because of family matters and him having to travel for business.

"Additionally, many of these questions remain unanswered, under consideration, or hypothetical, so that will complicate our ability to provide sufficient answers, as we previously discussed. We'll be in touch as soon as we can," Davis wrote.

Whitson, a proponent of the project, has said before that he's comfortable being in an "in-between period" after receiving the state money while they wait for a contract to answer more specific questions about the project.

"We are on the cusp of delivering to 2,000 households in Rappahannock County a once unimaginable, \$20 million high-speed fiber network, which is already 98% funded without having used a penny of local taxpayer funds," he said.

Whitson continued, "We are elected for the fundamental purpose of making good decisions and seizing opportunities that benefit our citizens and improve their quality of life. We cannot squander this one-time shot at universal broadband coverage. Put simply, we need to get this project done for our schoolchildren, our elderly citizens, and everyone else who struggles every day to do the simple things from home that internet-connected communities across our country have been able to do for years."

Carney said in a written statement that the regional project is a best-case scenario "where strength in numbers allows us to deliver fiber to homes."

"We have quite a bit of work ahead of us, but let's focus on the goal: to deliver to our citizens what they absolutely need," he said. "It is our job to protect the taxpayer and their interests, it is our job to protect the rural nature of our country while making life for all of us a bit easier! Delivering affordable, reliable, fast broadband on mutually beneficial terms is one of them."

# Broadband Authority left with more questions than answers

► Contract doesn't specify locations eligible for service ► No penalties if provider fails to deliver

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

Members of the Rappahannock County Broadband Authority are concerned about the lack of details found in the long-awaited contract from All Points Broadband and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) that was expected to outline specifics of a potential universal internet expansion project in the county.

In a special meeting on Monday, the body took a first

look at the contract, which it received last week along with other adjoining documents from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

As a part of an eight-county agreement, Rappahannock County was awarded state funding in December for All Points Broadband to build a universal fiber network, on the condition that the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors provide \$5.9 million of the county's money toward the project.

County Administrator Garrey Curry outlined in a

memorandum some of his initial concerns about the contract:

The contract does not specify exactly what locations in Rappahannock will be eligible for service. Representatives from All Points and NSVRC pitched the project as a "whole jurisdiction approach," but the contract does not define what "universal" broadband will look like.

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The contract states that during the first 12 months service is available in a locality, installing fiber to your home will be a flat rate of \$199, no matter the length of the fiber drop. But, the contract does not state how much installation will cost after that 12 month period.

The contract also states the \$199 fee will be for “residential locations.” Curry wrote that the \$199 fee should be available for all locations.

“Basic tier” monthly service will be a fixed rate of \$59.99, only to be indexed for inflation. Curry wrote “there is inadequate detail regarding how the consumer price index (CPI) will be applied... There needs to be more than a general reference to ‘CPI’ as it is a very broad and geographically varied index.”

There are no penalties in place if All Points and NSVRC fail to operate the system after installation is complete. It is also not clear what party would be responsible to recoup county investments in the event of a failed project.

Sharon Pandak, a Fairfax-based attorney the body hired to analyze the document, said Monday that All Points and NSVRC seem unwilling to change any language of the contract. Pandak said she can potentially negotiate amending the document to answer more of the body’s questions.

For the county to receive the state funding, and by extension universal

**TO WATCH** Monday’s Broadband Authority meeting, go to [rappnews.com/video](http://rappnews.com/video)

broadband, the Board of Supervisors must sign the contract with All Points and NSVRC by May 5, but Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Donehey has said during public meetings that the deadline could potentially be extended. However, Curry said there is pressure coming down from the state to push the project forward.

“If I were you, I’d be the last to sign this and see what every other county squeezes out through the mill, and you can be flexible enough to call a meeting whenever you need to call the meeting to [vote],” Curry told the authority on Monday.

Over the last month, Curry has reached out to the other seven counties in the regional agreement to see if the other localities wanted to work together to advocate for potential shared interests. But none of the other counties were interested, he said.

“Rappahannock County finds itself in a position of the tail trying to wag the dog and I naively thought that our shared interest with the seven other counties would provide leverage, but the other counties have not shown a willingness to engage to exert that leverage,” Curry wrote in the memo.

Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Donehey said Rappahannock will likely be one of the last localities to vote

on a contract, since the Board of Supervisors next regularly scheduled meeting is May 2 and the current deadline to sign a contract is May 5.

“What will be interesting is our peers, the other counties, most of them will meet before we do on [May 2], so we’ll be able to see if they’ve brought up any other concerns or if they’ve signed [the contract],” Donehey said. “It’s nice to kind of be late at the signing point to just be able to hear what else is being brought up.”

While members of the body were hesitant to say how they plan to vote on the contract, others, like Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson and Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney, said they still intend to move forward in supporting it.

Whitson and Carney said their biggest concern was the lack of definition for what “universal coverage” in Rappahannock will look like, along with the fact that All Points has yet to present detailed maps of where exactly the company plans to provide service.

“I know our county and all the little lanes and hollows and it worries me when you have someone without local knowledge coming in and putting down pretty significant infrastructure like this,” Whitson said. “You could imagine a scenario where people might be skipped over and so whatever we need to do to make sure that doesn’t happen ... I think we should do.”

Whitson said that once those details are straightened out, he won’t delay the project and hopes to see people in Rappahannock with All Points service in a relatively short period of time. It is still unclear when installation and construction would begin, and which locality would be the first to receive service.

Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier has been an outspoken skeptic of the project since All Points CEO Jimmy Carr pitched the proposal to the Board of Supervisors last summer. In an interview, Frazier said: “I basically have been right all along,” arguing that the company has yet to answer for the many concerns about the project that he and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith, another skeptic of the proposal, have raised over the past year.

“It’s the most bizarre thing that I’ve ever seen our county be involved in, and for that matter, probably the most bizarre thing in the Commonwealth of Virginia,” Frazier said of the project.

He said the strangest piece of the contract to him is that there are no safeguards outlined for localities investing money into the project, and nothing in the document that explicitly requires All Points to finish the project once started. Frazier said he does not support the contract as it currently stands, but would not say whether he will ultimately vote to oppose it.

“The current agreement fails to address our concerns for consumer protections and service guarantees,” Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith wrote in a statement. Smith abstained from a vote last fall to apply for state funding with All Points. “There’s no cap on the county’s investment and there’s no guarantee of service. Any contract must make it clear that cost overruns due to inflation or supply line issues cannot fall back on the county. Expectations for the service’s roll-out, key milestones,

**COUNTY ADMIN GARREY CURRY:**  
**“Rappahannock County finds itself in a position of the tail trying to wag the dog and I naively thought that our shared interest with the seven other counties would provide leverage, but the other counties have not shown a willingness to engage to exert that leverage.”**

and project oversight should be concrete and quantifiable. Also, the service area maps and eligibility descriptions are not clear.”

Much of the Supervisors’ financial end of the deal has been covered by federal stimulus dollars and private donations, with \$315,000 left to cover. The Board of Supervisors set up a private donation portal through the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation for private parties to make individual contributions. The Supervisors have maintained that the cost of the project will not be funded by taxpayers.

Here are other key takeaways from the 23-page contract, which can be viewed online at [rappnews.link/fa0](http://rappnews.link/fa0):

▶ All Points agrees to make available a broadband internet service plan offering upload and download speeds of 50 mbps (the “Basic Service Tier”) for a monthly fee of \$59.99. The company agrees that the monthly service fee for the Basic Service Tier shall not increase by more than the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index, published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

▶ Property owners will be notified that they are eligible for installation by All Points through All Points’ “advertisements.”

▶ All Points will be responsible for maintaining all installed infrastructure.

▶ For a period of five years following the completion of the project, All Points agrees to allow NSVRC to inspect the internal quality control and quality assurance records maintained by the company.

*Meetings & Notices*

▶ The **Washington Town Council** will hold a budget work session on April 16 at 10 a.m. at the Town Hall.

▶ **Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission** will meet on Wednesday, April 27, at 1 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Orange County Public Safety Building, 11282 Government Center Dr., Orange. Public comment may be submitted at the meeting, or via email prior to the meeting to [planinfo@rrregion.org](mailto:planinfo@rrregion.org) or by calling (540) 829-7450, ext. 11 by 10 a.m. on April 27. The agenda and supporting materials will be posted to the Commission website one week in advance of the meeting.



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# BROADBAND DECISION DAY



**Hampton  
Supervisor  
Keir  
Whitson**



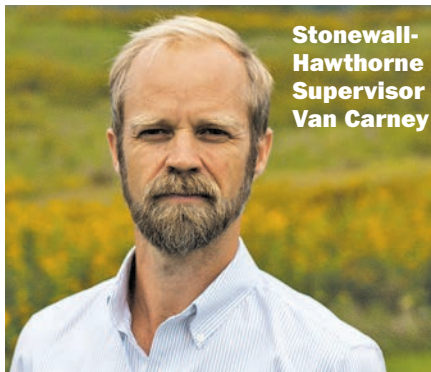
**Piedmont  
Supervisor  
Christine  
Smith**



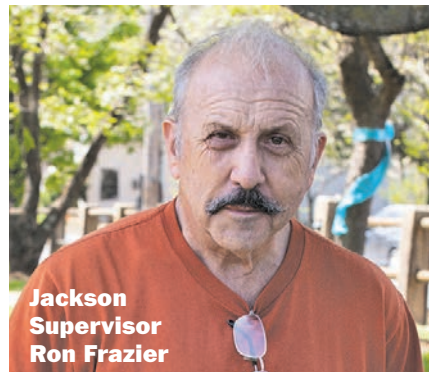
**Wakefield  
Supervisor  
Debbie  
Donehey**



**A months-  
long process  
will likely be  
decided by the  
Supervisors  
on Monday**



**Stonewall-  
Hawthorne  
Supervisor  
Van Carney**



**Jackson  
Supervisor  
Ron Frazier**

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## Faced with monumental vote, Board of Supervisors expected to approve broadband expansion

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**BY JULIA SHANAHAN**  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors on Monday will be faced with making the hugely consequential decision of whether to advance universal internet expansion across the finish line as part of what County Administrator Garrey Curry called the “most important project” the county has undertaken in decades.

While a majority of the body is expected to support the measure for it to advance, the decision isn’t as clear-cut for other members in the minority.

“If we just decided we just don’t want broadband here, I think those consequences of being the only uncolored spot on the map would be very bad for our community,” Curry said in an interview.

The Board of Supervisors will decide whether to enter into a contract with private internet provider All Points Broadband and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commis-



“

It's a shame, it probably is a very significant vote that we're involved in, but we don't know any information about it. We have no maps, we don't know where [All Points is] building. We're going to be locked into this thing for at least three years.”

RON FRAZIER, Jackson District supervisor

## SUPERVISORS

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sion (NSVRC) that would commit Rappahannock County to an eight-county agreement using state and federal funds to build universal fiber infrastructure.

If the Supervisors enter into the contract, Rappahannock officials expect to be able to expand internet access to thousands of underserved homes at no cost to the taxpayer.

Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Donehey said this project is a “once in a lifetime opportunity,” especially for a rural community like Rappahannock where construction of fiber infrastructure can be extremely challenging because of the terrain and lack of housing density.

“When you don't have choice, I think [this project] becomes extremely important,” Donehey said of the lack of internet service options available to many Rappahannock residents. “We don't have the ability to have cell towers everywhere and cell service everywhere, and multiple Comcast or other fiber companies ... Prove me wrong, I'd be happy to be wrong, but I think it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

Rappahannock County has always suffered from connectivity issues, and many residents are committed to protecting its viewsheds by opposing the construction of utilities like cell towers. Other internet providers in the county, like Piedmont Broadband, are less than ideal for residents who have geographic barriers that prevent a stable connection. And dial-up options are known to be archaic and sluggish.

Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney, the most recently-elected member of the body, started his tenure in January after the application process for state funding was completed. On the campaign trail, Carney said he hadn't heard any voters oppose the prospect of gaining high-speed internet.

“Rappahannock never had a railroad, Rappahannock never had tele-



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR Foothills Forum

Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier reads the historical plaque explaining the Confederate Monument outside the county courthouse.

graph, Rappahannock has historically not had cell towers, and there are certain things that Rappahannock just doesn't do — we're an outlier in many respects,” Carney said. “And this project will get people online completely, and the people that have gone through COVID totally detached and totally needing the internet for numerous reasons, whether it's school or health and safety, all that kind of stuff, are going to finally get it.”

The COVID-19 pandemic added pressure on officials to solve the county's internet service woes. Stories become widespread of students attempting to connect to Zoom and do homework from home, while adults in the same household also had to work

using the same internet connection that became stretched too thin. That resulted in students sitting in parking lots to reach hotspots to complete homework.

“

Prove me wrong, I'd be happy to be wrong, but I think it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

DEBBIE DONEHEY, Wakefield District supervisor and Chair

As a part of a federal initiative to help states strengthen broadband connectivity, the pot of money being offered through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) was larger than usual, and localities also received portions of their allocated federal stimulus funds that can be used to cover the project costs.

“All of a sudden because of COVID, there was so much money being thrown at the problem. And I know it ultimately comes down to taxpayer dollars at the federal level, but \$20 million to Rappahannock County is hard to even fathom,” Donehey said. “So to be at this point of vote or no vote for the potential of every household who was unserved to have fiber is pretty exciting.”

Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson said the county has been waiting decades for an opportunity like the one All Points is proposing, and the pandemic created an unusual set of circumstances that are allowing localities to build the infrastructure.

He said just over a year ago, there were no internet service providers that wanted to invest in Rappahannock's rural economy. Whitson said he would consider it “malpractice” to vote against this project.

“For me, it has gotten to a point where it's truly a no brainer,” Whitson said. “And I understand that there's risk to the extent that we don't have complete and total control over the government agency and the private entities that are delivering this system to us. But that risk I think is one worth taking.”

But two members, Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith, have been constant critics of the project since its early days.



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR Foothills Forum

Wakefield Supervisor and Board Chair Debbie Donehey at the Griffin Tavern, her business in Flint Hill.



➔ Frazier voted against entering into an agreement with All Points Broadband to apply for state funding, making him one of only three Board of Supervisors members across the eight counties in the agreement to vote against the application. Smith abstained from the vote, saying at the time she had unanswered questions about the project.

Frazier said he won't support the contract as it currently stands.

"It's a shame, it probably is a very significant vote that we're involved in [on Monday], but we don't know any information about it," Frazier said. "We have no maps, we don't know where [All Points is] building. We're going to be locked into this thing for at least three years."

Frazier and Smith have both expressed concern over the lack of communication from All Points and NSVRC throughout the process, and both entities' unwillingness to answer questions from members of the body. Smith did not return several requests for comment for this report.

In a Broadband Authority meeting earlier this month, Curry outlined his concerns about the contract in a memorandum to the body after it received the document on April 7, giving the county less than a month to review it before having to vote on it by the state's May 5 deadline.

Curry's concerns include the contract not specifying exactly what locations in Rappahannock will be eligible for service, what fiber installation will cost after the 12 month period and what penalties are in place if All Points Broadband fails to operate the system after installation is complete. It is also not clear what party would be responsible to recoup lost county investments in the event of a failed project.

Whitson and Donehey said their biggest concern going forward with the contract is All Points' promise of universal coverage for each county in the agreement. Rappahannock's topography is vastly different from that of other counties, and Whitson said making sure every hollow and side road in Rappahannock receives service must be a priority.

"I certainly will do my part once this project is underway to make sure that nobody is being missed, and that the system is being delivered in the most efficient way possible and that it happens

as quickly as possible," Whitson said.

Curry and Sharon Pandak, a Fairfax-based attorney the authority hired to review the contract, have been working with the NSVRC on language in the contract, but Pandak said it's unlikely any language will change. She said it might be possible to negotiate amendments to the contract.

Curry wrote in an email that he "has not received any updated agreements at this time so I cannot comment on how 'negotiations are going.' I'll defer any stipulated positions on hypothetical positions and just wait to see what

“

For me, it has gotten to a point where it's truly a no brainer.”

KEIR WHITSON,

Hampton District supervisor

we know at the time the [Rappahannock County Broadband Authority] and [Board of Supervisors] consider an opinion.”

Frazier said another reservation of his is a stipulation that the county cannot approach other internet service providers to inquire about possible services in Rappahannock while the county is doing business with All Points. This "good-faith clause" is something that Smith has also repeatedly cited as a concern.

"We can't really work on other solutions," Frazier said. "I'm trying to prove something that doesn't exist, because we're not allowed to work on anything. We're not allowed to talk to any other companies. And I don't know who all these people are [who support the project]. Our meetings are very sparsely attended. Who are these people that want this? Where are they?"

The project has generated interest across the county, which has been seen in numerous letters to the editor published in the Rappahannock News

and dozens of residents attending public meetings to speak on the need for broadband since the project was proposed last summer.

But opponents in the county have not shown the same public fervor over the broadband project as they have for past local issues that sparked culture wars, like a proposed bike path in 2018 that caused opposition yard signs to emerge across the county and brought out dozens of people to a single public meeting.

While Frazier didn't know why residents haven't shown the same interest in the broadband project, the other three members of the body in support of the project say it's because broadband is not a divisive issue in the county.

"I think just because by nature, it's not [political]," Carney said of broadband expansion. "I mean, people want it. Pretty short and simple. People really want it, in fact. People want it so badly that's all everybody's talking about. It's hard to be divisive when everybody wants it."



Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson working at home in Harris Hollow.

BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER FOR Foothills Forum

## BEHIND THE NEWS

# How Rappahannock's universal broadband plan – powered by federal subsidies – became irresistible

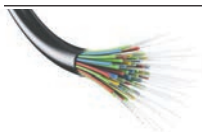
BY TIM CARRINGTON

*For Foothills Forum*

As Rappahannock County approaches a decision point on participating in an ambitious eight-county high-speed broadband plan, advocates might pause to salute two events that make the milestone project possible: the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 and the resulting passage of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act in March 2021.

The virus shone a spotlight on the digital divide that leaves many Americans without fast and reliable internet service. More importantly, it led to the sprawling American Rescue Plan Act, which pumped money into pandemic-stricken communities and localities needing an economic jumpstart after months in lockdown.

Without Covid, the robust subsidies that make the broadband plan hard to resist would never have materialized. And policymakers and industry experts alike say that without generous subsidies, Rappahannock — with 27 residents per square mile and many hills and hollows — could



## PLAN

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never attract private internet providers to install the infrastructure necessary for county-wide, high-speed service at affordable rates.

The complex broadband venture isn't a service procurement but a public-private economic development program presented to Rappahannock and seven other counties as a package. Responsibilities and roles involve a mosaic of federal and state agencies, private interests and utilities.

All Points Broadband, the Leesburg-based company that would build the fiber optic connections to homes and businesses, just a few years ago was a wobbly provider of wireless internet service. But it now operates from a new business model where the company's services are embedded in collaborative structures that mix public, private and philanthropic contributions to bridge the digital divide that leaves parts of the population outside the reach of reliable internet service. And behind the current project's byzantine organization chart is a giant funding source: ARPA, which would bankroll much of the work through three waves of support:

▶ The State of Virginia is providing just over \$96 million from ARPA.

▶ Rappahannock has earmarked \$715,768 of its ARPA monies to cover a portion of the \$5.9 million the county is obliged to put up for the project, whose overall costs in the county are estimated to be \$19.5 million.

▶ With local supporters pledging \$5,585,768, Rappahannock faces a remaining obligation of \$314,232. Donations currently being mobilized may erase even that, but if they fall short, Rappahannock can turn again to ARPA, which shows \$650,768 of unallocated county funds available to be tapped.

## No 'Plan B'

Because of the subsidies, the project's many supporters point out, the county will get what it's wanted for twenty years — high-speed, nearly universal internet, without increasing taxes, borrowing or digging into financial reserves.

Two skeptics on the Board and Supervisors — Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith — have raised questions about the proposal from the start and aren't expected to go along with the plan.

County Administrator Garrey Curry prepared a laundry list of what he considers shortcomings and information gaps in the project's contract; but none of the other seven counties joined his demand for tightening up the document, and All Points Broadband appears unwilling to renegotiate terms or even reword phrases Curry finds troubling. Officials from All Points didn't respond to an interview request for this article.

Notwithstanding the questions and reservations, the project is likely to be embraced at the Board of Supervisors meeting May 2 because so many people in the county see it as a singular



FILE PHOTO BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

opportunity. While disappointed that the other counties aren't supporting his push for tightening the contract, Curry isn't suggesting that Rappahannock walk away from the project. He points out that no other internet company has offered a proposal to provide service across the county. "There really is no equivalent Plan B," he says.

Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney and Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey, are expected to vote for moving ahead. As the supporters see it, the risks and worries are outweighed by the advantages of installing infrastructure for near-universal high-speed coverage at no expense to the taxpayer.

"Finally, after two decades, something is happening," Whitson said. "This is being brought to us." Moreover, extended foot-dragging would risk missing the opportunity: Curry points out that federal pandemic relief funds must be obligated by December 2024, and fully expended by December 2026.

## Local needs, local support

The momentum to embrace the project is evident in the contributions enabling Rappahannock to come up with the \$5.9 million it's obliged to bring to the table: Washington resident Chuck Akre is donating \$3.5 million through his family's Fagus Foundation; the Warrenton-based

PATH Foundation has approved a \$1 million grant; the Rappahannock County Public Schools are putting in \$370,000; an anonymous citizen has pledged a matching grant of \$150,000, which would become \$300,000 if fully leveraged. Then there is the federal government's ARPA contribution of \$715,768, with more money to fill any funding gap that might remain.

Part of what has shifted the calculus is a changed perception of what the internet is for. Once seen as elite entertainment, now high-speed, reliable and affordable internet is understood as critical for ordinary activities of ordinary people. It helps them pursue education, access medical services, find jobs, hire workers, and buy or sell houses and tractors. And Covid exposed the downside for the disconnected: many Rappahannock students found their education not just disrupted but effectively stalled due to poor or nonexistent service.

Rappahannock County Piedmont School Board member Rachel Bynum said that according to some estimates, "as many as two-thirds of our students don't have reliable broadband at home." She added: "This means limited access to school communication and classwork if school is remote ... It obviously is limiting and inequitable as well."

Carney said, "Across demographics, I have heard, 'Get it and get it fast. We need affordable internet and we need it now.'" He and others point out that while the broadband project has sparked debate, it hasn't ignited a replay of past Rappahannock culture wars.



Across demographics, I have heard, 'Get it and get it fast. We need affordable internet and we need it now.'

VAN CARNEY,  
Stonewall-Hawthorne District supervisor

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 18% of Rappahannock residents lack internet service. But many residents categorized as internet-connected complain that their service is slow, intermittent and clumsy. Whitson pointed out that the high-speed fiber envisioned in the pending project is "the gold standard" for broadband access.

Whether a significant portion of Rappahannock residents enjoys that gold standard will depend on the efforts of an intricate network of players:

▶ **All Points Broadband:** The seven-year-old Leesburg company would build high-speed fiber optic connections to homes and businesses. All Points in turn has been transformed through a powerful new backer, Searchlight Capital Partners, a private equity firm, one of whose partners is Ajit Pai, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission from 2017 to 2021, and before that an FCC commissioner for five years. Rappahannock Electric Cooperative would work with All Points in extending the fiber optic lines to locations that currently are unserved. All Points would run fiber lines to homes and businesses using easements that REC already has in place, both aerial and underground.

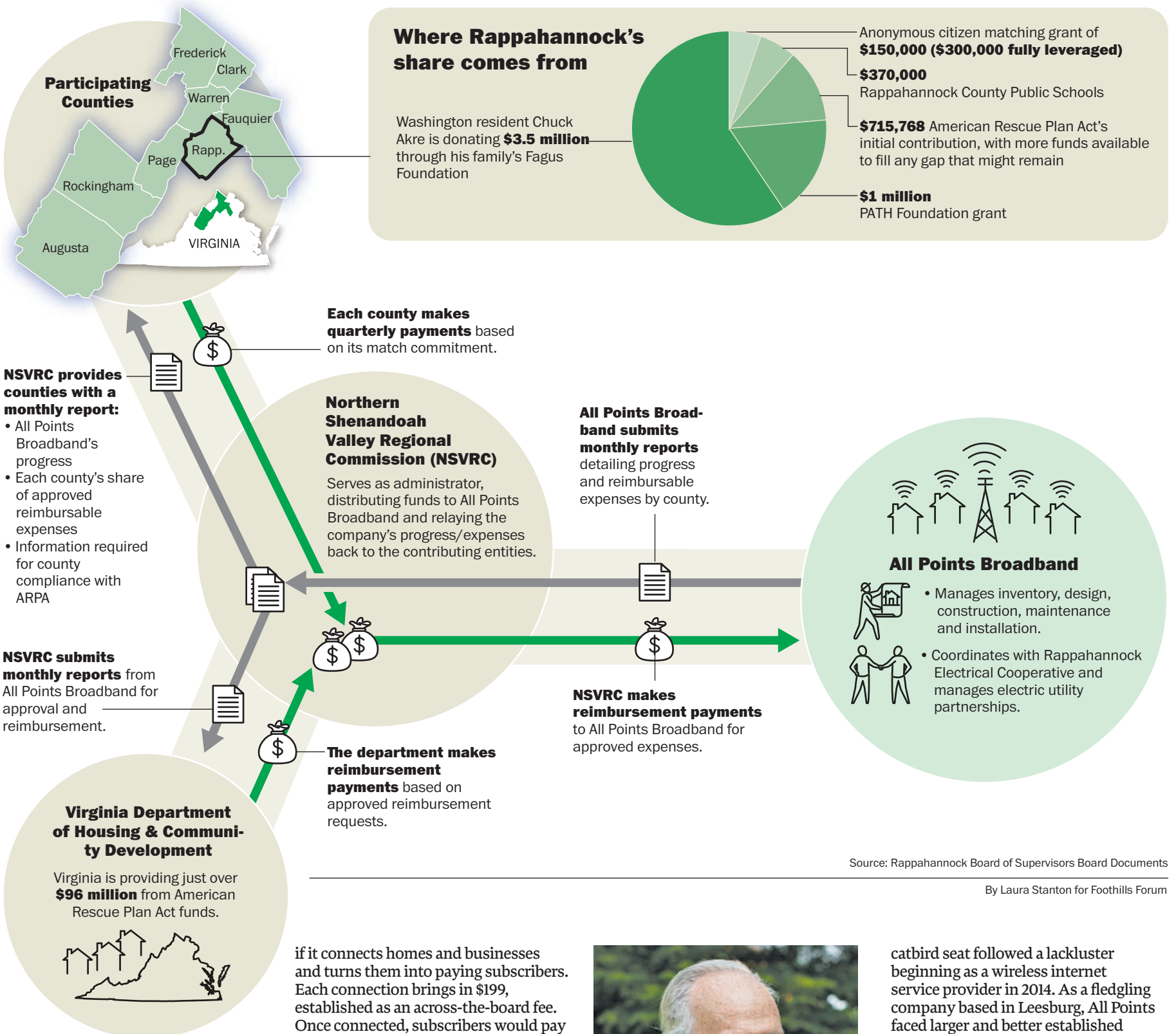
▶ **NSRVC:** At the center of the project, acting as fiscal agent, is the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission, which would review monthly progress reports from All Points and then request reimbursements from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development. That department would then draw funds from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative. NSRVC would use the money from the state, together with funds from the counties, to reimburse All Points, based on its progress in installing fiber connections.

▶ **The eight counties:** Based on their agreed-to financial commitments, the participating counties would make quarterly payments to NSRVC. NSRVC would provide monthly progress reports to the counties, plus information required for county compliance with ARPA. NSRVC, not the counties, is the sole entity with a legally binding relationship with All Points.

The collaborative structure is complex, but as Whitson sees it, there is some safety in numbers: he figures that the various partners each have incentives to make the project succeed. In sum, he says, "It's too big to fail." →

# The broadband mosaic

The eight-county high-speed broadband project involves multiple partners, roles and funding sources. Here is how funds and information would flow:



Source: Rappahannock Board of Supervisors Board Documents  
By Laura Stanton for Foothills Forum

➔ Though absent from the organization charts, factors well outside the region may influence the unfolding project: inflation, worker shortages and supply-chain disruptions could affect the progress of the project, as with every enterprise, public or private. The uncertain economic environment is one reason that policymakers hesitate to set down timelines for the project. Nonetheless, the lifeline ARPA funds carry expiration dates that will discourage delays.

## All Points in the catbird seat

Beyond the promises built into the collaboration, All Points will be subject to straightforward market incentives. The company would only make money

if it connects homes and businesses and turns them into paying subscribers. Each connection brings in \$199, established as an across-the-board fee. Once connected, subscribers would pay a starting monthly rate of \$59.99, which can rise with the rate of inflation.

Moreover, though All Points is the only internet company participating in the broadband plan, it wouldn't enjoy a permanent monopoly. Locally-owned Piedmont Broadband and billionaire Elon Musk's Starlink, among others, provide internet service in Rappahannock, and if All Points' customer service is disappointing or too costly, users could opt for one of the other companies.

Starlink says its service is unavailable to new Rappahannock subscribers until at least 2023 because of satellite limitations. And Piedmont Broadband's service is subject to limitations caused by geographic barriers.

Whitson noted that while All Points has incentives to deliver quality service, it's clear that the company has claimed "the catbird seat" by attaching itself to a subsidized private-public partnership that no other company can



FILE PHOTO BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

**Washington resident Chuck Akre's** company made a significant investment in All Points but sold its stake to a private equity group last year.

replicate. The participating counties show a combined population of 416,509, according to the Census Bureau; if all eight counties shared Rappahannock's 18% level of internet disconnection, and all disconnected residents opted for the plan, All Points would pull in \$15.3 million in connection fees, followed by \$4.6 million in monthly subscriber fees.

For All Points, the journey to the

catbird seat followed a lackluster beginning as a wireless internet service provider in 2014. As a fledgling company based in Leesburg, All Points faced larger and better established competitors such as Verizon and Comcast as it pushed to link up customers in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and Maryland.

The company was buoyed by a significant investment from a private partnership organized under the umbrella of Akre Capital Management, the investment group launched and run by Washington resident and philanthropist Chuck Akre. But All Points' fortunes turned in 2021, when the Akre partnership sold its investment to Searchlight Capital, a growing private equity group. While he has a philanthropic interest in the project, Akre has no financial stake in All Points today.

Around the same time, Searchlight made a key recruitment, bringing in Ajit Pai, the former FCC chairman who had immersed himself in possible strategies to close the digital divide by

See **PLAN**, Page 15

# PLAN

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connecting unserved or under-served communities. Meanwhile Virginia Governor Ralph Northam was pushing for policymakers and companies to establish universal broadband throughout the state of Virginia. In 2019, the Virginia General Assembly called for innovative collaborations between localities, electric utilities and internet service providers.

Jimmy Carr, All Points' chief executive officer, was well-placed to tap into the state's enthusiasm for expanded internet access. He had previously worked for Democratic Governor Tim Kaine, and his mother, Betsy Carr, is a longtime Democratic legislator in the Virginia House of Delegates. In July 2021, a four county-project in Virginia's Northern Neck provided a glimpse of All Point's new business

strategy, and presaged the project now taking shape in Rappahannock and the neighboring counties.

The multi-county Northern Neck plan carried robust federal and state funding, plus a partnership with an electric utility. All Points would get paid to make the connections to the homes and businesses that would become future subscribers. "Bridging the digital divide is a complex challenge that requires new business models and new ways of thinking," Carr said as the Northern Neck project got underway. "We are excited to bring more projects like this to fruition."

All Points and Searchlight pored over maps of underserved communities, which — with subsidies — could be affordably connected. The eight Piedmont counties, including Rappahannock, became the logical next step. Covid added pressure to address the counties' digital divide, and the federal government provided the additional ARPA funds the counties would need to make their

financial commitment to the project.

In September 2021, Rappahannock's Board of Supervisors voted to move the plan to the next phase of active consideration, though Frazier voted against the project and Smith abstained. Notwithstanding the resistance, the puzzle pieces were falling into place.

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## WHAT IS FOOTHILLS FORUM?



**FOOTHILLS**  
FORUM

Foothills Forum is an independent, community-supported nonprofit tackling the need for in-depth research and reporting on Rappahannock County issues. The group has an agreement with Rappahannock Media, owner of the Rappahannock News, to present this and other reporting projects.

► More at [foothills-forum.org](https://foothills-forum.org)

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# Supervisors vote to enter broadband pact

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- ▶ **Expanded coverage:** Project promises high-speed internet connections to unserved areas
- ▶ **Split vote:** Frazier, Smith raise concerns about accountability, ‘fine print’
- ▶ **What’s next:** Installation timeline uncertain

**BY JULIA SHANAHAN**  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors in a split vote on Monday approved entering into an eight-county agreement with All Points Broadband and the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) to vastly expand internet access in underserved Rappahannock County in the most significant move the body has taken in recent memory.

The 3-2 vote comes after nearly a year of discussions among the body about whether to fund a universal fiber project with the Leesburg-based All Points by using state funding, federal stimulus dollars, grants, donations and investments from the internet service provider — all without expending taxpayer dollars. In June 2021, the body solicited potential broadband solutions for Rappahannock, and All Points was the only provider that proposed a universal coverage plan.

Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier and Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith voted against entering

# BROADBAND

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into the contract after opposing it for months. Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey, Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson and Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney voted in favor of the project, ultimately entering the county into a binding contract with All Points Broadband.

“In all big projects, there’s always risk,” Carney said. “And there’s always risk in not doing it, especially with this project. There are so many folks in this county who desperately need this, and we have an opportunity to get it.”

Frazier reiterated concerns that he’s mentioned at previous public meetings, including a lack of communication from All Points to the counties and the fact that All Points has not provided maps that show which specific areas they plan to serve.

“I think I understand the project enough to know if [All Points] miss my part of the district in the county, there’s not much I or this board collectively can do about it,” Frazier said.

Smith said she thinks Rappahannock County will have “very minimal control” over the project since the county’s financial contribution will go into a fund with NSVRC to then be dispersed to the project. The counties are not a party in the agreement, and Curry has called it an “economic development” project rather than the county purchasing a good or service.

STONEWALL-HAWTHORNE SUPERVISOR VAN CARNEY:



**“In all big projects, there’s always risk. And there’s always risk in not doing it, especially with this project. There are so many folks in this county who desperately need this, and we have an opportunity to get it.”**

Smith abstained from a critical vote last fall that tied Rappahannock County to an agreement with All Points and seven other counties for a bid for state funding through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative, while Frazier voted against it.

“I keep hearing this is a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity,’ and I think if someone were to tell me something was a once in a lifetime opportunity, I would read the fine print very carefully, and I’m very concerned that we aren’t doing that,” Smith said. “If I truly believed that this would get internet service to everyone in the county that needed it, as we initially perhaps understood it to be, I would vote for it.”

After expressing concerns about the contents of the contract, County Administrator Garrey Curry and Sharon Pandak, a Fairfax-based attorney hired to assist with the broadband proposal, spent the last few weeks negotiating its terms with NSVRC. Curry was able to amend the fiscal agent agreement to include language that fixes the county’s financial contribution to the project so they will not be required to pay more than what was initially proposed.

Curry was also able to negotiate a term in the fiscal agent agreement that links it to the grant agreement, which is the contract that includes All Points. He said while that change seems subtle, it’s important to the overall agreement.

“We do have to have some faith that the state will uphold their end of the agreement and will protect their \$96 million in a way that is in keeping with our interests and our \$5.9 million,” Curry said of the total amount of state dollars awarded to the project.

Those interested in receiving All Points’ service can register personal information in a survey offered by the company. Residents will be notified when service becomes available in their area, although it’s not clear when that may be. The survey, which can be read online at <https://fiber.allpointsbroadband.com>, also outlines locations in the county deemed underserved.

Those not in an unserved area but who still would like All Points’ service will be able to apply for a special installation to their home. All Points and the county will advertise about how residents can register for service once a more detailed construction timeline is unveiled.

PIEDMONT SUPERVISOR CHRISTINE SMITH:



**“I keep hearing this is a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity,’ and I think if someone were to tell me something was a once in a lifetime opportunity, I would read the fine print very carefully, and I’m very concerned that we aren’t doing that.”**

tion to someone’s home, no matter the length of the driveway or location of the residence. It’s unclear what installation may cost after the first year.

An All Points internet service plan will offer upload and download speeds of 50 mpbs (the “Basic Service Tier”) for a monthly fee of \$59.99, which is subject to change along with increases in the Consumer Price Index.

Up to this point, the Supervisors have not been able to solicit other internet service providers to do work in the county while under the terms of a memorandum of understanding with All Points. This “good-faith” clause has been a major point of contention among both Frazier and Smith, who have both been critical of the entire project since the outset.

Pandak said during Monday’s meeting that because of language in the contract and other documents, the good-faith clause would end after a locality signs the contract, meaning the Supervisors are no longer bound by that rule.

Other concerns shared among the body were outlined by Curry in a memorandum to the body last month after it received the contract on April 7, giving the county less than a month to review it before voting on it by the state’s May 5 deadline.

Curry’s concerns include the contract not specifying exactly what locations in Rappahannock will be eligible for service, what fiber installation will cost after the 12 month period and what penalties are in place if All Points Broadband fails to operate the system after installation is complete. Those concerns remain unaddressed in the contract approved by the Supervisors.

Other members of the body, including Whitson and Donehey, have voiced concern over All Points’ promise of universal coverage. Whitson has said that members of the body will have to be diligent in keeping track of where service is being installed in the county to ensure that anyone who wants service receives it.

Still, both remain ardent supporters of the project ahead. “I do believe this is our opportunity,” Donehey said. “This is now for Rappahannock County. It is going to take a while, we are going to have hiccups. But I know how passionate the people in this county are to help each other.” ➔

## What we know

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative already completed its “fiber backbone” down many of the county’s main roads, so All Points is able to use that infrastructure when the company starts extending broadband to homes.

According to the contract, All Points will hire independent contractors to help build out the infrastructure. Monitoring and inspection of the project will be completed by NSVRC and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. All Points will be responsible for maintenance of the fiber.

The project will cost about \$19.2 million in Rappahannock County, according to estimates from All Points, and the county will be responsible for \$5.9 million of that cost.

Washington resident Chuck Akre is donating \$3.5 million through his family’s Fagus Foundation; the Warrenton-based PATH Foundation has approved a \$1 million grant; the Rappahannock County Public Schools are putting in \$370,000; and an anonymous citizen has pledged a matching grant of \$150,000, which would become \$300,000 if fully leveraged. Then there is the federal government’s contribution of \$715,768 through stimulus funds, with more money to fill any funding gap that might remain.

For the first 12 months that All Points service is available in the county, it will cost \$199 for a fiber installa-

## 21ST ANNUAL RAPPAHANNOCK SPRING PLANT SALE

**Saturday**  
**May 7**  
**2022**  
**8:00-2:00**



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## What's next?

➔ There is currently no information available on when or where All Points will begin installing service, and the path ahead remains uncertain. “We don’t know what we don’t know,” Donehey said. She expects there to be more information after the state’s May 5 deadline.

Donehey said she is currently working to make postcards to mail to Rappahannock residents with information about the project. She also said it will be important to involve the community in letting people know about the project, so that those who want service can get it while installation is \$199 since it’s unclear how much the price may hike when the initial 12-month period comes to a close.

## What people are saying

During the public comment period of the meeting before the vote, about 10 residents stood up to speak, a majority in support of the project. Over the last year, the Board of Supervisors has heard mixed opinions from residents at public meetings about the initiative.

Some residents have expressed concerns about broadband potentially bringing more people and development to the county, while others have been skeptical about the level of construction that will take place in a county with challenging topography.

Piedmont resident Robert Yowell, also a member of the Rappahannock County Recreational Facilities Authority, posted a lengthy statement on Facebook and submitted it to the body as public comment, saying he opposes the project because of outstanding concerns Curry outlined in his memo. As someone who works with computers, Yowell wants to see more reliable internet in the county, but he is uncomfortable with the current proposal.

“This proposed broadband access plan is NOT too big to fail,” Yowell wrote. “I fear it is doomed to fail. I don’t agree that the benefits will outweigh the risks; it is the exact opposite. I am highly suspicious that the end result will be a vast amount of money will be wasted on a project that will get ultimately forfeited during its tenure.”

Stonewall-Hawthorne resident Ben Mason, who has done home repairs for Verizon, said that he’s seen instances where the fiber installation has damaged homes. The All Points contract does not outline homeowner protections.

“The drills are 12-14 inches long, they go through the brick, they go through the stucco, they go through the siding, aluminum, vinyl, cedar, whatever,” Mason said of the equipment used to install fiber. “Imagine you’re in your house and there’s a drill coming through — uh oh, it’s in the wrong place. Now my drywall needs to get fixed.”

Those in support of the project have recounted stories at public meetings about the times their children had to do homework in the car parked near a hotspot, or how inclement weather can make it more difficult to access in-

### CONSUMER COSTS

**\$199**

**Cost for a fiber installation to someone’s home during the first 12 months that All Points service is available in the county.**

**\$59.99**

**Monthly fee for All Points’ “Basic Service Tier,” which is subject to change along with increases in the Consumer Price Index.**

ternet and phone service, posing safety concerns.

Patty Hardee, executive director of the nonprofit Rapp at Home, told the body that strengthening broadband will help senior citizens in the county meet their social needs and increase safety by allowing people to reliably make emergency calls.

“More and more of [portable devices used to call 911] are going to wireless communication — broadening the range of use — but relying on an internet connection,” Hardee said. “As more and more device manufacturers go to wireless communications, seniors will need broadband for them to work.”



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER



**TO WATCH** the Board of Supervisors hear public comment and discuss and debate whether to participate in the broadband project during Monday’s meeting, go to [rappnews.link/112](https://rappnews.link/112)

Stonewall-Hawthorne resident Bob Ryan, former NBC4 chief meteorologist, called the vote an “historic moment” for the county and that he had hoped it would be unanimous.

“Everybody wants to see it succeed,” Ryan said of the project. “Every constituent of every supervisor wants to see it succeed. Every supervisor


should be on board, and so if you’re not, go back to the young families. Tell them ‘I don’t think education is important for your elementary school.’ Go back to the seniors, say ‘No, I don’t think senior information on the internet is important, I’m against it.’ Go back to people that don’t have cell — landline is failing.”

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# Broadband Authority deadlocked

Members could not agree  
to authorize initial payment  
for universal coverage

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Broadband Authority continued their Monday meeting to next week after disagreement arose over whether to approve the first round of funding for universal broadband expansion.

During what's typically routine business of approving county expenditures, Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith and Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier said they would not vote to authorize payment to the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) unless All Points Broadband, the provider responsible for installing fiber in eight counties, assures the authority that

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## BROADBAND

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their promise of “universal coverage” will include Rappahannock County’s hard-to-reach locations.

Representatives from All Points and the NSVRC have told the body in presentations that any resident who wants to receive All Points coverage and isn’t currently served by an internet service provider that can deliver adequate speeds will be eligible for All Points service.

Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Donehey and Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney both said they were ready on Monday to authorize the payment. But without clear majority support, the chair declined to hold a vote.

The absence of Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, who remains out after having suffered a heart attack in July, left the body without a potential tie-breaking vote to approve the payment. Whitson has been a staunch supporter of the All Points coverage proposal, and has emphasized at past meetings the importance of moving forward with the project in a timely manner. Whitson did not immediately return a request for comment.

The first payment for the eight-county broadband expansion project is due Oct. 1 for each locality in the agreement, including Rappahannock. The authority continued the

### WAKEFIELD SUPERVISOR AND CHAIR DEBBIE DONEHEY:

**“So to say, we’re not going to approve the first payment after we have told the citizens of Rappahannock County that they’re going to have fiber to their home is rather embarrassing, as far as I’m concerned.”**

meeting until next Monday, Sept. 26, in the hopes of receiving an answer for Smith and Frazier from All Points and NSVRC on how both will ensure universal broadband coverage in Rappahannock County.

Carney said he did not wish to stall the project. “‘Universal’ only means one thing,” he said. Donehey said she wanted to follow through on the contractual agreement the body entered in May and make the payment.

“We signed the contract, and any contract I sign personally, for my business or whatever, means I’m going to do what I say I’m going to do in that contract, and when a contract has specific dates for payments, I live up to those because that is what I expect of anyone that owes me money,”

Donehey, also owner of Flint Hill’s Griffin Tavern, said.

She continued, “So to say, we’re not going to approve the first payment after we have told the citizens of Rappahannock County that they’re going to have fiber to their home is rather embarrassing, as far as I’m concerned.”

Smith and Frazier voted against entering into the eight-county regional agreement in May, making Rappahannock County the only county in the agreement to have Supervisors oppose the project. Both members have voiced skepticism of the project since All Points came forward with the proposal last year.

On Monday, Smith and Frazier said they would not vote in favor of authorizing the first round of payments before they are assured that every resident in Rappahannock County who is not currently served with adequate broadband will be covered by this proposal.

Representatives from All Points and NSVRC have told the body in the past that residents who are currently unserved will be able to receive coverage, no matter their location in the county. If a resident is living in an area that is not being covered by All Points, they can apply for a “special construction charge” and the provider will cover that household if it’s deemed to be unserved.

Smith and Frazier argued that contracts provided by the company

### PIEDMONT SUPERVISOR CHRISTINE SMITH:

**“I can tell you, I think I’m the only person at this table that worked for a telecommunications company, and if you don’t have something in writing, you don’t have anything. And I’m sorry to be the one to say it. But that’s the bottom line.”**

that the Supervisors approved do not precisely define “universal coverage.” A review of the contracts did not reveal a straightforward definition of the term outlined by the provider, but the application for state funding written by All Points and NSVRC states multiple times that the company is committed to providing “universal coverage.”

The two Supervisors said they want to wait to receive a response from All Points and NSVRC before authorizing the first payment. Smith declined to say how she would respond if the body doesn’t receive an answer by Sept. 26. The body can “cross that bridge when they get to it,” she said. ➔

## **R** TO **WATCH**

Monday's  
Broadband  
Authority  
meeting use  
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camera to scan

the QR code above, or go to  
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➔ “I personally don't even want to take this vote, because it's pretty clear how people feel, but I do think we should take the opportunity to get an answer to our question,” Smith said. “I can tell you, I think I'm the only person at this table that worked for a telecommunications company, and if you don't have something in writing, you don't have anything. And I'm sorry to be the one to say it. But that's the bottom line.”

In the All Points and NSVRC application for state funding, both reiterated their commitment to universal coverage for “underserved areas,” which the company has defined in presentations to the body as areas that are not currently

served by an internet service provider that can deliver adequate speeds. This includes areas in Rappahannock County where residents have been quoted thousands of dollars for Comcast to deliver service.

“This Region has adopted this project as its collective strategy for achieving universal broadband, and this project will achieve universal coverage for 8 Counties containing more than 18% of the estimated unserved locations remaining in Virginia,” the company outlined in their application.

The Board of Supervisors and Broadband Authority, comprised of the same members, voted 3-2 in May in favor of entering into a regional agreement with All Points, NSVRC and eight counties to receive universal, fiber-to-home broadband, which will be deployed by All Points. All Points and NSVRC said residents can expect construction to begin next year. The provider was given a 2025 deadline by the state to complete the project.

The Broadband Authority continued the meeting to Monday, Sept. 26, at 5:30 p.m. at the Rappahannock County courthouse.

# Supervisors skip out — and speak up

▶ Smith, Frazier absent from broadband meeting

▶ Move blocks county's ability to make key payment on time

▶ Residents react to stalemate; Board to meet again Monday



BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Broadband Authority was unable to officially convene on Monday night after Supervisors Christine Smith and Ron Frazier did not attend, as the body is now expected to miss the deadline for its first quarterly payment toward broadband expansion.

**The two seats on the left are usually occupied by Supervisors Ron Frazier and Christine Smith, who didn't come to Monday's meeting.**

More than two dozen members of the public attended what was instead deemed an impromptu “town hall” where officials answered resident’s questions to combat misinformation since the body lacked a quorum. Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson unexpectedly attended Monday’s meeting via Zoom — the first public appearance he has made since July after having suffered a heart attack. Wakefield Supervisor and Chair Debbie Done-

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hey and Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney were in attendance, but the body lacked a physical quorum with just two members in the room, so an official meeting could not be convened.

The Broadband Authority, comprised of the same members of the Board of Supervisors, will take up the issue at a joint meeting on Monday, Oct. 3, two days past the Oct. 1 quarterly payment deadline for broadband expansion that the county agreed to meet. While the chair could have called a special meeting for Friday, Donehey said on Tuesday she chose to hold it during the regular Board of Supervisors meeting to make it as convenient as possible for members of the Broadband Authority.

Donehey said Smith and Frazier both informed her Monday morning that they would not attend the meeting later that night, but did not provide a reason for their absence. Carney said in an interview that Smith and Frazier emailed the body on Monday saying they wouldn't be available after Whitson said he would be attending the meeting via Zoom.

Smith said in an interview on Tuesday that she would have attended a special-called meeting for later this week to discuss the payment, and that she plans to attend the joint meeting next week. She declined to say whether or not she plans to approve the payment. Frazier on Tuesday did not return a request seeking comment on whether he plans to attend next week's meeting.

The Board of Supervisors approved 3-2 a contract in May committing funding to the project without pulling from Rappahannock taxpayer dollars. It's not certain what it means for the county to miss the Oct. 1 deadline to approve the payment.

Donehey expressed concerns last week that the county may face potential legal consequences if they miss the deadline. "The county citizens want and need broadband," Donehey said. "The Board of Supervisors and the Broadband Authority agreed to a contract that will provide it. Refusing to honor our commitment under that contract can have ramifications well beyond the single agreement."

County Administrator Garrey Curry said Monday that failing to meet the deadline is not likely to immediately impede the project, but that it may become problematic if the county were to continue missing payment due dates.

Attorney Sharon Pandak, who was hired by the Broadband Authority, had plans to brief the body on Monday about the legal implications of potentially missing the payment deadline. Since the authority did not officially convene, Pandak, who was in attendance on Monday, did not speak.

Monday's meeting was supposed to be a continuation of a Sept. 19 Broadband Authority meeting after the body could not agree on whether to approve the first round of funding for broadband expansion. Whitson, who remains in recovery from the heart attack, was not able to attend the Sept. 19 meeting, leaving the body without



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

**Paul Kirchman, a volunteer for the Sperryville rescue squad, asked residents at Monday's meeting to raise their hands if they were in support of the broadband project.**

**RESIDENT DAPHNE HUTCHINSON:**  
**"I've never seen an end-run as smarmy as this one, around the will of the majority, a majority vote, taking advantage of Keir Whitson's heart attack. I just think that's the smarmiest thing ever."**

a tie-breaking vote needed to approve the payment. Recent trends show that Frazier and Smith often vote together in the minority against Donehey, Carney and Whitson, especially on matters concerning broadband expansion.

Frazier and Smith said they wouldn't approve the first payment without reassurance from All Points Broadband, the provider responsible for installing fiber in eight counties, that "universal coverage" means residents in the county's remote corners will receive service. Both Supervisors have been opposed to the broadband project since its inception and were the only two officials in the eight-county agreement to vote against proceeding with a contract with the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission (NSVRC) and All Points.

All Points and NSVRC have stated multiple times in an application and in-person that the company is committed to providing "universal coverage." Representatives from the company and the NSVRC have told the body in many presentations that any resident who wants to receive All Points coverage and isn't currently served by an internet service provider that can deliver adequate speeds will be eligible for fiber.

Smith encouraged the body at the Sept. 19 meeting to continue the meeting to Sept. 26 while they await a response from the companies. The two supervisors' support for the payment is contingent on receiving from the organizations answers they deem ac-

ceptable.

In an interview, Smith said she did not attend the Monday meeting because she "didn't think there was anything to do" since the body had not received what she deemed to be a sufficient answer from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) on a question about the contract the county already signed.

The body received a response from the housing department on Friday afternoon, addressing Smith and Frazier's concerns about the project. "DHCD does not define or determine universal coverage. That is solely the function of the local government in their submission of their [state funding] application," wrote Tamarah Holmes, director of the Office of Broadband at the housing department.

Frazier said he had to work Monday night on site at a government facility and was unable to attend the meeting. When asked late last week, Frazier declined to commit his support for authorizing the first payment. "I never did support this thing in the beginning, and I don't know why I'm being asked how I'm gonna vote now," he said at the time.

"What's going on here is absolutely, positively regrettable and ridiculous," Whitson said of Smith and Frazier's conduct. "Our reputation as a county is on the line. We are putting at risk our relationship with very, very generous foundations and donors ... I'm beside myself with regret that we're sitting here fighting over a simple accounts payable issue."

Donehey said last week that the absence of Whitson opened up the opportunity for Smith and Frazier to block the payment. "Ron all along has had questions and frustrations because he couldn't get answers, and I understand that," Donehey said last week after Frazier opposed making the payment. "So, I think this was an opportunity to make a point of that and he took it."

"They're politically savvy, which I am not," she said of Smith and Frazier. "I just stand by my handshakes and my contracts."

**RESIDENT DEAK DEAKINS:**  
**"I commend Supervisors Smith and Frazier for their stance on asking for more information. I think it's a reasonable request...I understand contractual relationships. I also understand the need for full disclosure, full information."**

Carney said that by not attending, Smith and Frazier were attempting to prevent the meeting from taking place.

"If Mr. Frazier and I had wanted to kill the funding, all we had to do was let the vote play out last Monday," Smith said, noting that the chair declined to hold a vote on the payment last week after it became clear there wasn't enough support for it to pass. "The motion and the second was in place, and we could have held the vote right then, and there would have been no funding. But that's not what I did."

## Residents speak out

More than two dozen county residents attended Monday's meeting under the impression that it would be an official meeting of the Broadband Authority. After Donehey informed the crowd that it would instead be a "town hall," many residents who spoke said they were disappointed that Smith and Frazier were absent.

The officials who did attend the meeting also used it as an opportunity to answer questions from residents and combat swirling misinformation about the project.

"I think it's irresponsible for the other Supervisors to not show up to this meeting — for elected officials to not be part of this discussion is ➔

→ simply irresponsible,” said Sperryville resident Kerry Sutton, owner of Before & After cafe.

Others said they believed Smith and Frazier were taking advantage of the fact that Whitson could not attend the meeting in person, using it as an opportunity to block the payment.

“I’ve never seen an end-run as smarmy as this one, around the will of the majority, a majority vote, taking advantage of Keir Whitson’s heart attack,” said Hampton resident Daphne Hutchinson. “I just think that’s the smarriest thing ever.”

Paul Kirchman, a volunteer for the Sperryville Rescue Squad, asked residents at the meeting to raise their hands if they were in support of the broadband project, and then asked for a show of hands of people who opposed it. Nearly the entire room raised their hands in support of the project; only two attendees showed opposition.

Piedmont resident Carolyn Butler was one of the residents opposed to the project, and said she currently has Comcast but still has issues with phone service and internet at her home. So, she said, under the current broadband proposal, she wouldn’t be eligible for All Points service, even though her internet can be unreliable.

Deak Deakins, the other resident in attendance who opposed the project, said he thinks Smith and Frazier’s request for more information from the companies is reasonable.

“I think I have a say in this, and I don’t want to pay and I not be served,” Butler said. “And those others that think they are gonna get service — if it’s like mine, God help you, we’re wasting our money.”

No local tax dollars are being used for the project. When the Board of Supervisors committed to the regional agreement, they also committed \$5.9 million in county funds. This has been nearly completely covered by federal stimulus dollars and private donations. The rest of the project is being funded by a state grant and All Points.

Amissville resident Page Glennie, who attended the meeting via Zoom, called the project a waste of money and accused the body of not thoroughly reviewing the project application before signing a contract. Donehey said in an interview that she and Curry, along with Pandak, reviewed the contract for months before signing.

Many other residents said they felt broadband expansion was for the betterment of the entire county, even if a small portion of residents are not able to be immediately serviced by All Points.

“Why disenfranchise 95% of the people because 5% at this stage, from what I understand, can’t get [service]? It doesn’t make any sense,” said Hampton resident Henry Gorfein, noting that those percentages are hypothetical numbers for a scenario where some residents might not qualify for service.

*Ben Peters contributed reporting*



## VIDEO ONLINE



**TO WATCH** last week’s Broadband Authority “town hall,” use this QR code or go to [rappnews.com/video](http://rappnews.com/video)

## Fast Facts: BROADBAND

▶ **RAPPAHANNOCK’S COMMITMENT:** On May 2, the Board of Supervisors voted three-to-two to join 7 neighboring counties to participate in a high-speed fiber optic broadband project, offering connectivity to thousands of Virginians with unreliable connections or none at all.

▶ **NATURE OF THE AGREEMENT:** Rappahannock’s commitment isn’t structured as a service procurement, but a contract making the county part of a larger public-private development project that involves a mosaic of companies, utilities, and agencies.

▶ **WHO’S ACTUALLY PAYING?:** Not Rappahannock taxpayers. The state of Virginia is putting up \$96 million from its allotment of pandemic rescue funds under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Rappahannock allocated \$715,768 from its share of ARPA funds. Another \$5.6 million was pledged by local supporters—including the Akre family’s philanthropic foundation, the Rappahannock County Public Schools, and the Warrenton-based PATH Foundation.

▶ **THE SERVICE ISN’T FREE:** All Points, a Leesburg-based broadband firm, would install fiber-optic for homes and businesses at an across-the-board rate of \$199 per connection. Subscribers then pay a monthly rate of \$59.99, which can increase with the rate of inflation.

▶ **WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?** The fiscal agent is the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission, which reviews reports from All Points, and then requests reimbursements from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development, which in turn draws funds from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative. In signing the contract after its May 2 vote, Rappahannock, with the other seven counties, agreed to make quarterly payments to the NSVRC, which would make regular reports back to the participating counties. The first payment is due Oct. 1.

▶ **TIMELINE FOR INSTALLATION:** The State of Virginia set July 2025, as the deadline for All Points to construct the broadband network. All Points hasn’t provided details on when and where the work will get underway.

— Tim Carrington

# Supervisors ok all future broadband payments

▶ Split vote came after threatening letter from provider ▶ County 'failed to meet its first obligation'

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
*Rappahannock News staff*

The Rappahannock County Broadband Authority in a split vote on Monday approved all future funding for broadband expansion after All Points Broadband sent a letter to the body threatening to delay fiber construction in Rappahannock County since it was late to make its first contractually obligated payment toward the project.

The authority, comprised of the same members of the Board of Supervisors, failed to authorize the first

quarterly payment for the expansion project by the Oct. 1 deadline the county agreed to when signing a May contract with the regional commission overseeing the project. Piedmont Supervisor Christine Smith and Jackson Supervisor Ron Frazier skipped out on the Sept. 26 Broadband Authority meeting, leaving the body without a physical quorum and unable to vote on the payment.

The body authorized the payment, and all future quarterly payments owed to the company, on Monday in a 3-2 vote, ensuring that contractually obligated

payments toward the project will not be blocked in the future.

Smith and Frazier encouraged Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey to continue the Sept. 19 Broadband Authority meeting to Sept. 26 after saying they wouldn't approve the payment without reassurance from All Points Broadband, the provider responsible for installing fiber in eight counties, that "universal coverage" means residents in the county's remote

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corners will receive service, despite the company having assured the county of that numerous times.

Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson, who remains in recovery from a July heart attack, was not able to attend the Sept. 19 meeting, leaving the body without a tie-breaking vote needed to approve the payment. Whitson attended Monday's Board of Supervisors and Broadband Authority meetings remotely via Zoom.

All Points sent the body a letter Monday morning, saying that Rappahannock County "has failed to meet its first obligation under circumstances that raise the potential that the County may be unwilling or incapable of timely fulfilling its related obligations in the future."

Because Rappahannock County made the first payment past the deadline, All Points is considering delaying installation of fiber connections in Rappahannock until the county pays the full \$5.9 million, which the body earmarked on Monday. The letter stated that the determination could be revisited, but it is unclear what that decision will be. Rappahannock was the only county in the agreement to make the payment late. Donehey said County Administrator Garrey Curry would draft a response to All Points informing them that the body approved all future payments to the project.

## SUPERVISOR KEIR WHITSON:

**"It sent shivers up my spine when Mr. Carney read that letter out loud. There's so much at stake here, and to put ourselves in this position is incredibly regrettable..."**

Smith and Frazier did not comment during the meeting on the contents of the letter, but Frazier reiterated that representatives from All Points had declined to attend meetings in Rappahannock County to answer questions. The letter also offered that Rappahannock County could withdraw from the regional project with no financial penalty, but neither Smith nor Frazier said they wanted to withdraw, even when asked directly by Stonewall-Hawthorne Supervisor Van Carney.

Many people attended what was deemed an "impromptu town hall" last week when Smith and Frazier were absent from the specially-called meeting, calling out the two supervisors for "taking advantage" of Whitson's heart attack to block the payment.

In an email to the Rappahannock News, Frazier called the Sept. 26 meeting "theater," saying "if [the body] knew for certain we were not coming, what other reason did they have for what transpired." Frazier made similar comments during Monday's Board of Supervisors meeting, suggesting Donehey should have canceled the meeting if she knew there wouldn't be a quorum. Frazier's email did not address the letter from All Points. Smith did not return a

# ALL POINTS BROADBAND

Live Connected.

October 3, 2022

Debbie Donehey  
Rappahannock Board of Supervisors  
3 Library Road  
Washington, VA 22747

Chairwoman Donehey:

The NSVRC 2022 Accelerated Fiber Deployment Initiative ("Initiative") is one of the most significant broadband infrastructure projects in Virginia history, involving eight counties, three electric utilities and over \$300 million in capital investment. The Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission ("NSVRC") has informed APB Partners Valley, LLC ("APB") that Rappahannock County (the "County") did not make timely payment of its initial obligation due to NSVRC in its capacity as Fiscal Agent for the Initiative in accordance with the terms of the Fiscal Agent Agreement dated as of June 28, 2022.

An infrastructure project of this size and scope cannot be financed and completed without certainty that each partner will timely meet its financial obligations. An actual or perceived unwillingness of the County to fulfill its financial obligations may negatively affect the terms on which the Initiative can be financed and could therefore have implications for other participating Counties.

The County has failed to meet its first obligation under circumstances that raise the potential that the County may be unwilling or incapable of timely fulfilling its related obligations in the future. In order to limit the risk to other participating counties and other partners, APB has informed NSVRC that, after completing design activities, APB will not commence construction activities in Rappahannock County until such time as 100% of the County's local matching commitment has been received by NSVRC. If the County takes prompt action to demonstrate its commitment to the project and certainty that future obligations will be met, this sequencing determination will be revisited.

The County accepted an invitation to join a regional initiative and related governance structure developed by NSVRC and APB in collaboration with seven other counties. The County has consistently demonstrated a lack of confidence in the team and project approach established for the Initiative by all other stakeholders.

The County should select a strategy for bridging the digital divide that is consistent with the County's goals and preferred approach. If participating in the Initiative is not consistent with the County's preferences, APB will support a timely request from the County to withdraw from the Initiative without penalty. Virginia is expected to receive significant additional funding through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment ("BEAD") Program, which could be available for the County to leverage in partnership with another provider.

The successful realization of this regional Initiative depends on the sustained commitment of all partners to the agreed framework and approach.

Sincerely,



Mark Zaruba  
General Counsel

## The letter sent by All Points Broadband, the provider for the regional broadband expansion initiative, to the Board of Supervisors on Monday (Oct. 3), ahead of that day's vote on funding the project.

request for comment.

"I think what transpired when they said they weren't going to attend was political theater," Donehey said in an Oct. 4 interview. "... I think we've all said hearing from the public is a good thing, and we went forward to hear from the

public. I think what we witnessed last night, a board minority attempting to derail the board's will on a project that would serve a majority of our homes, was political theater. And I think it lit a fire under a lot of our citizens who don't want to lose this opportunity."



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

## CAN YOU GET THE NEW SERVICE?



► For people who are unsure if they qualify for All Points service, officials are asking residents to fill out a survey provided by All Points. To find the survey, visit <https://fiber.allpointsbroadband.com> or use the QR code above.

► BOS Chair Debbie Donehey said that if you live in an area where you are unable to afford Comcast and you don't qualify for All Points service, reach out to her and let her know. To find the most up-to-date information on the project, visit [rappbroadband.org](http://rappbroadband.org).

As a part of an agreement with seven other counties, Rappahannock County agreed to contribute \$5.9 million of its own money toward the project, which has been nearly completely covered by private donations and federal stimulus dollars. According to the fiscal agent agreement the county signed in May, under that contract, the county is supposed to pay installments toward the project while construction takes place.

"It sent shivers up my spine when Mr. Carney read that letter out loud," Whitson said. "There's so much at stake here, and to put ourselves in this position is incredibly regrettable and I think we need to remedy this today."

Dozens of residents attended the Board of Supervisors meeting on Monday to watch the body vote on the payment, with many advocating for broadband expansion during public comment.

"We really need to focus on what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people, and is it the greatest good to obstruct something because we don't have a precise definition of universal?" said Wakefield District resident John Beardsley. "Or is the greatest good to provide a critical utility that is essential to everyday life these days?"

Smith and Frazier have been opposed to broadband expansion since the project's inception and were the only two officials in the eight-county agreement to vote against proceeding with the contract. On Monday, they reiterated their skepticism of the project and concerns that some areas of the county won't be covered by All Points, but did not cite any specific evidence to back their claims.

All Points and NSVRC have stated multiple times in an application and in-person that the company is committed to providing "universal coverage." Representatives from the company and the NSVRC have told the body in many presentations that any resident who wants to receive All Points coverage and isn't currently served by an internet service provider that can deliver adequate speeds will be eligible for fiber.

Donehey said she lives in an area in Flint Hill that is technically covered by Comcast, but was quoted \$40,000 to have Comcast service delivered to her home. She said after filling out a survey created by All Points, she was told her home would be serviced by All Points under their plan.

**"We really need to focus on what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people, and is it the greatest good to obstruct something because we don't have a precise definition of universal?" said Wakefield District resident John Beardsley at Monday's meeting.**