City of Alexandria, Virginia
Commission on Information Technology

January 25, 2021 IT Commission Meeting Minutes
7:00 – 8:30 PM
Virtual Meeting

In attendance: Catharine Rice (CR), Chris Soghoian (CS), Brandon Mosoriak (BM), Michelle Rief (MR), Sara Crifasi (SC), JD Maddox (JM), Sundar Kanagarajan (SK) Lynda Bennett (LB)

ITS/ACPS Staff: Vanetta Pledger, Tori Butler, Dr. Elizabeth Hoover,

Absent: Darrlynn Franklin, John Sczech, Ricardo Alfaro, Christopher Lewis, Marcus Washington

Guests: Members of Public attended.

1. **Welcome/Introductions**

2. **Update on the homework gap (Dr. Elizabeth Hoover)**

   - ACPS loans out Kajeets to students (Verizon hotspot with filter). They have loaded out 1,400 Kajeets serving 2,000 students.
   - ACPS already had vendors in place before the pandemic, this helped for additional internet capacity and hotspots.
   - PK-3 students received Chromebooks.
   - ACPS purchased 3,000 additional Chromebooks, they still haven't received them.
   - ACPS is paying families' Comcast bills. 187 families have signed up with Comcast Essentials.
   - Upcoming hybrid learning is going to strain the ACPS network. The network has been increased to 10GB, looking into 40GB infrastructure.
   - Webcams and secondary displays have been distributed to teachers.
   - CS: What are the sources of friction with Comcast?
     - Lack of multilingual support
     - Customers being asked for SSN, which isn't a requirement
     - Some hardware hasn't worked properly because apparently Comcast is handing out used routers
     - Have heard complaints that Comcast seems to lower its level of customer service when working with 'Essentials' customers
   - CS: What is the bandwidth needs for?
     - Preparation for hybrid learning (zooming in and out)
     - Cost of hardware and services at least $1M
     - ACPS abandoned infrastructure upgrades for this year to get students needed hardware
   - JM: Is it possible to get fixed internet where families are co-located?
     - ACPS has tried to locate these places by using heatmaps tied to students who received free/reduced meals
     - Mobile hotspots can't penetrate buildings

3. **City's Digital Equity Plan (Vanetta Pledger)**

- IT staff has been instructed to develop a Digital Equity plan by Council as part of COVID-19 Recovery Plan.
- Different paths/ideas will be discussed: resources? training? knowledge? devices?
- Other ideas around digital literacy, jobs, partnerships.
- ITS has transferred old smartphones to DCHS to be used by patrons.
- ITS is looking for feedback on this from the City IT Commission.
- Let Catharine Rice know if you want to be on the Digital Equity Committee.

4. **Update on City's broadband project (Vanetta Pledger)**

- The budget had been reduced from $10M to $5M.
- There were 30 prospective bidders, four bidders are anticipated: two have worked on City projects previously, two that bid on the project the first time.
- Consists of two conduits: one full conduit for City use, one empty conduit for private sector use.
- CR: When is the estimate for breaking ground? Don't know at this time due to the fluid budget situation.
- CS: Will the new Landmark/Inova development be part of this project? This will be discussed.
- CS: It there a requirement for developers to take conduit to new buildings? ITS will follow-up re: this.
- CS: Can Planning and Zoning department be invited to discuss the above? Vanetta will invite them.
- CS: Can we use Virginia Tech as an upstream provider to get to internet hub in Ashburn? Vanetta will check on this.
- CS: Has the City looked into creating a broadband authority? The City could both create the paperwork for an authority and a feasibility study on it simultaneously.
- CS: Propose motion for the City to become a broadband authority. Seconded by SC, approved unanimously.
- The IT Commission will send a letter of support to Council for creation of a broadband authority to give the City flexibility.

5. **Approval of December 14, 2020 minutes** – Motion by MR, seconded by SK, minutes approved by unanimous vote.

6. **Legislative Committee Update (SC)**

- SC: Proposed emergency broadband fund for $3.2B.
- JM: We can aggregate sources of policy news regarding Alexandria and surrounding jurisdictions. This will be sent around and added to our website.

7.   Adjourn by unanimous vote at 8:30pm. (Next meeting is via Zoom **February 22, 2021**.