

**HSV POA Governmental Affairs Committee  
March 2, 2018 Reports**

**Tri-Lakes Metropolitan Planning Organization Report**

Submitted by David Whitlow

ARDOT held an open house and public involvement meeting Tuesday, February 27, 2018 at Fountain Lake School in Safe Room A between 4:00 and 7:00 pm. This forum was part of the environmental assessment for the more than 5-mile, two lane extension that will connect the Highway 70 East interchange to the junction of Highways 5 and 7. This project is part of the \$54.6 million bond issue Garland County voters approved in a 2016 special election.

The Tri-Lakes MPO policy board met on Thursday, February 22, 2018 at the offices of the West Central Planning and Development District on Central Avenue in Hot Springs. The next scheduled meeting of the board is May 24, 2018.

- A draft of the revised Tri-Lakes MPO Public Participation Plan was presented by study director Robert Tucker for the board to review. The revised plan will be voted on at the May 24th meeting.
- Josh Walker of ARDOT reported that earthwork will start March 5, 2018 on the Highway 7 south improvements from Highway 290 to the Ouachita River Bridge. Box culverts and pipes are being installed.
- Construction on Highway 70 from Hot Springs to I-30 continues. The project is approximately 81% complete with completion estimated by August 20, 2018.
- The Safety improvements on Highway 7 North from Bryant Road to Highway 298 West will not be required to have a separate environmental assessment.

**Hot Springs—Jerry Yeric**

- The owner of the Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa announced that Jim Fram, the former president and CEO of The Greater Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce and Hot Springs Metro Partnership, will be the vice president of development for the ongoing project to renovate the historic hotel. Al Rajabi, the new owner, says the hotel is not for sale, and he said it's the project of a lifetime and one that will define his career.
- Growth in downtown Hot Springs outpaced the state's average by more than 10x for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row.
- The government of Japan announced that Mary Zunick, cultural affairs manager of Visit Hot Springs, has been appointed the honorary consul of Japan in Hot Springs. She will assist the consulate-general of Japan in Nashville, TN. in promoting positive Japan-United States relations in Arkansas.
- Briana Moore, owner of Red Light Roastery, 1003 Park Ave., was named to an open seat on the Hot Springs Advertising and Promotion Commission.

**Garland—Jerry Yeric**

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- The Association of Arkansas Counties, Arkansas Municipal League and Arkansas Public Entities Risk Management Association have hired attorneys to sue the pharmaceutical industry for the cost cities and counties have borne because of what's been called the opioid crisis. The lobbying/advocacy groups for the state's cities and counties rarely align behind a common cause, but the urgency needed to address the scourge of opioid addiction has made these peculiar bedfellows. The Garland County Quorum Court and Hot Springs Board of Directors adopted resolutions last year authorizing the county and city to join the litigation, which so far has garnered support from 69 counties and more than 150 cities statewide.
- The Garland County Quorum Court Finance Committee gave unanimous recommendations to resolutions enabling the county to forgo the receipt of sales tax revenues from the purchase of materials and equipment supporting expansion of Morfe Windows LLC in Mountain Pine and Timber Automation LLC.
- After a 25-year career with the National Park Service, 14 of those in Hot Springs, Josie Fernandez, superintendent of Hot Springs National Park, announced she will retire at the end of March.
- 2018 will have a significant impact on the politics of Garland County and HSV for neither County Judge, Rick Davis nor JP, Larry Griffin will be on the ballot. Both have been important voices for HSV and will leave a large void for HSV. They have been easily accessible and understood the village. We owe them a great deal of gratitude for their service to the county and their advocacy of village needs.

### **Broadband Services and its Impact on Future Growth in Hot Springs Village - Greg Jones**

#### Overview

As Hot Springs Village works to increase property ownership and attract new residents from other areas, available high speed broadband is a requirement and generally viewed as a utility by most. Many of the potential residents are accustomed to very high speed Internet service that is generally available in most major cities and suburbs. While we will not likely be able to achieve the same level of services as these areas, the Village must, at least, have fairly ubiquitous coverage at a speed that enables residents to utilize the most common services such as: streaming video, video conferencing, online gaming, and fast web browsing.

#### Current State of Village Broadband

Over the last few months the Government Affairs Committee has had focus on the state of Broadband in the Village and has been contacted by many residents relaying issues with availability of service. Residents view this as a critical issue that should be addressed by the Property Owners Association and as one that can negatively affect the resale value of their properties.

In a recent survey by BroadbandNow.com, the zip code 71909 has several Internet service providers listed but the level of service is relatively poor. The average download speed is 17.4 Mbps which is

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17.5% slower than the average in Arkansas and 94.1% slower than the national average. If we are to attract residents that are expecting high speed broadband, we are well behind the curve. In addition, they estimate that 20% of our population has access to 1 or fewer wired Internet service providers.

Our topography presents many challenges to the service providers. We have many areas that are remote geographically, have few residents, or were poorly planned during development for installation of equipment from service providers. Wireless service may be the best solution for many of these areas.

The committee has also heard from both of our local school districts about the availability of Broadband service. Within the Village, there are approximately 700 school age children. These students are issued Chromebooks by the schools which only operate when connected to a broadband network. These students must find alternative locations to get connected (friends house, McDonalds, etc).

Business's in the Village are also effected by the lack of Broadband services. Many business locations have no broadband access which is a significant impediment to locating a new business in the Village.

#### Wireline Service Providers

Generally, we have 2 service providers in Hot Springs Village. The main providers of wireline Internet are:

- Suddenlink Communications (a division of Altice).
  - Initially focused its efforts on the newer portions of the Village on the East. Most residents that have access to the Suddenlink service can receive speeds up to 150 Mbps which is a reasonable rate for most service needs.
  - Has continued to expand their footprint in other areas of the Village in competition with AT&T.
  - Using Hybrid Fiber Coax the technology deployed by Suddenlink has the potential to offer much higher speeds. The company is offering 1 Gbps in several areas using this same technology.
  - Suddenlink's website currently shows available services for almost the entire Village regardless to whether they can service that address or not.
- AT&T
  - Originally deploying the first broadband using DSL technology. This service provided the early days of broadband access but is not considered to be capable of providing the speeds necessary for current services. AT&T is gradually discontinuing DSL in the Village and customers that disconnect their service are not able to reconnect.
  - Currently deploying u-verse service in several areas of the Village primarily in areas not served by Suddenlink. While AT&T launched this service with much fanfare several years ago, the company has redirected most of its focus to video services from DirecTV over the last couple of years. The u-verse service operates with a newer version of DSL but continues to suffer from low bandwidth operation.

#### Wireless Service Providers

In addition to the wireline providers, several wireless operators have been marketing services to the Village with limited results. However, it is expected that many of the traditional wireless cellular carriers may expand their offerings to Village residents but cellular coverage remains an issue.

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- AT&T
  - Introduced recently a wireless phone and internet service designed for fixed wireless applications. While they introduced the service for Arkansas, it seems to be unavailable in the Village.
  - Coverage for AT&T is also an issue. The committee has tested various wireless options from the carrier and it works well in certain areas within the view of a cellular tower it is not effective in areas with poor cellular coverage such as those in the Cortez area.

### Satellite and Alternatives

Alternative services are also available, but with significant cost disadvantages. Satellite Internet, Broadband wireless have been options but these services come with steep costs, limited bandwidth, and data caps. Many view these to be unreasonable alternatives for our community. One company, Arkansas Airwaves, had sold services to many Village residents and has recently ceased operation.

### Potential Strategic Initiatives for Broadband

Several strategies should be considered for improving our Broadband service footprint to residents.

### Public Wifi Service

The public WiFi service in Village public buildings is very poor. However, it could easily be improved and provide a valuable service to residents that have limited service at their residence. Many of the facilities are easily serviceable by either AT&T or Suddenlink with minimal costs for installation. While there would be installation and maintenance required, the costs are relatively low. A partnership could be explored with a private company to operate this service as a joint partnership with the POA.

### Increase Relationships with Existing Carriers

Over the last few months, the current wireline carriers have been very responsive to understanding the issues with Village Broadband. The challenge is that they will always work for a ROI (return on investment) in order to develop any new area of the Village.

With a comprehensive development plan, all the carriers have assured the committee that they will provide services to any new Town Center or Neighborhood developments. These projects generally have a very high ROI and are easily constructed by the carriers with limited investment costs. It is expected that those new areas would have significantly better Broadband than the average within the rest of the Village.

### Install a Village Operated Broadband Service

The costs of wireless Broadband equipment has continued to fall over the last 5-10 years. The technology to provide wide area wireless broadband is generally considered mainstream technology today. Using targeted wireless technology, the service could deliver high speed broadband to residents using fixed wireless WiFi technology.

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The POA has several towers and other taller structures that could be used as locations for base stations used in a wide area wireless solution. In addition, the Village has numerous fiber optic services that could be used for interconnect to the Internet.

The Village should explore this as an alternative technology for our residents. It could be deployed in stages focused on the areas that have the poorest service today. A partnership should be explored with a private company to operate and install this service. Using this approach gives the POA the most control over our Broadband destiny and could be used as a major marketing advantage to surrounding communities if our service availability can achieve rates similar to the national average.

**Conclusions**

While the current state of Broadband in the Village is well below average, there is a path forward that could lead the community to become a leader in Broadband services for our region giving significant marketing advantages to attract new residents. Many communities have used Broadband as a major differentiator that has led to significant new growth.

**Hot Springs Village Area Chamber of Commerce Report**  
**– Michael Dollar**

- A conference call on FEB 5th with the U.S. Office of Management and Budgets and US Census Bureau regarding the Garland County Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Representatives for Garland, Hot Spring, Clark counties attended with District Director for the Office of Bruce Westerman. A proposal to increase the current one county MSA of 95k population to include five counties (Pike, Garland, Clark, Hot Spring, and Montgomery) with population of 195k was discussed. The current requirement is to have 25% or greater workforce commuting into the area. The largest workforce commute was from Hot Spring County with just over 13%.
- At a follow-up meeting on FEB 21st Saline County Judge, Jeff Aries, asked a marketing firm to present research and an overview of the Saline County Fairgrounds in response to improvement needs of the facilities. The overview of the current facility, included an area competitive analysis, an opportunity evaluation, and an income/expense projection. Area businesses and Chambers were represented and used for a sounding board.
- Chamber ribbon cuttings with refreshments and entertainment by the HSV Board of Realtors and the Village Loan Closet took place on Valentine's Day, FEB 14<sup>th</sup>, and were well attended.
- Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, Joe Graham, over lunch with Lesley Nalley, John Weidert, Kevin Sexton, and the Chamber at the Granada Grill on FEB 9th. Mr. Graham is a candidate for Garland County District Judge. The Judge and Prosecuting Attorney positions are non-partisan.
- The Chamber attended the Fountain Lake Community Advisory Meeting on FEB 22<sup>nd</sup>. Student demographics, Website navigation, and future expansion plans were presented to approximately twenty community leaders. A student presented a project that overlaid school districts on an interactive map. Parcels could be selected which linked to the school district the parcel was located in. The map is designed to be used by realtors and others as a tool when selling homes to families or moving into a new location within the area.

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- The Chamber attended a soft-opening reception on FEB 7<sup>th</sup> at the new Beehive Neighborhood Hang-out on 220 Minorca Road. Recommend going as soon as possible.
- The HSV POA Governmental Affairs Committee (GAC) submitted a Gap Analysis on Medical Services, Broadband, and Transportation for consideration in the Comprehensive Master Plan.
- License Plate Frames with “FOLLOW ME TO Hot Springs Village” arrived FEB 26<sup>th</sup>. Cost is \$10 per frame. Purchasing began immediately upon arrival at the Highway 7 Visitor Center.