

Governmental Affairs Committee Reports

August 4, 2017

MetroPlan – Keith Keck

Central Region MetroPlan received two presentations at the July Meeting:

- University of Central Arkansas presented information on their Center for Community and Economic Development. This curriculum is geared towards community leaders focused on development. This curriculum may be a three-year leadership program or one-day training opportunities.
- MetroPlan presented the MetroTrends Demographic Review. The review highlighted the region is still heavily commuter-oriented, with the focus of the commute being downtown Little Rock. The review also highlighted the decrease in regional population growth rate from previous year projections, with Saline County still leading the region in growth rate. Little Rock and Conway still have higher actual population growth numbers; however at lower percentage rates.

Highways (Tri Lakes MPO) - David Whitlow

The Tri-Lakes Policy Board did not meet in July. The next scheduled meeting is August 24, 2017. The following information has been obtained from various news sources including the *Hot Springs Sentinel Record*.

- Highway five safety improvements project is nearing completion. Paving has been completed from Salt Creek Rd. near Benton to Goose Pond Road at the Garland County/Saline County line.
- Utility relocation is continuing on Park Avenue from the junctions of Highways Five and Seven to the Gorge Road (Highway Seven Spur)
- Highway 70 to Interstate 30 construction continues with many lane closures. Completion is expected in late 2018.
- The Arkansas State Highway and transportation department is asking for public input on how to pay for the maintenance of the over 16,000 miles of highways for which it is responsible. Information and a survey are available on their website. www.arkansashighway.com.
- Garland County Judge Rick Davis expects the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department to hold a public hearing later this year on the MLK extension to the junction of Highways Five and Seven. By then, the right-of-way should be established and a conceptual plan completed. The projected cost estimate is over \$60 million.

Benton Chamber of Commerce – Paul Day

- On July 18, I attended the Benton Chamber Gov't Affairs committee at the Gann Museum at 218 S. Market in Benton. Displayed there, in addition to a history of Benton, is a loaned exhibit of World War I. This includes pictures, uniforms, weapons, etc. The Gann building was built in 1890 and is the only know structure to be built out of bauxite aluminum ore. The museum is open Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10 till 4 or by appointment by calling 501-778-5513.
- I also toured the new Benton Boys and Girls Club in Riverside Park. Programs include art, photography, computers, life skills, games, all forms of athletics, etc. There are 600 active members (all of them seemed to be there that day) and a waiting list for this outstanding facility. This is the finest facility for youth that I have ever seen.

The Hot Springs Village Area Chamber of Commerce - Michael Dollar

- The Visitor Center on AR N Highway 7 and the West Gate greeted 192 non-residents in June, higher than the average 133 per month this year. The number of non-resident phone calls are averaging 180 per month. At the current rate, total annual resident and non-resident walk-ins and phone calls are on track to surpass last year by approximately 500 additional people.
- The Hot Springs Village Area Chamber of Commerce Facebook page, hotspringsvillagechamber.com, reached 40,129 people with a recent posting of the new Clampit's Country Kitchen and Meat Market and Raffaella Rose at Cortez. Videos on the page were viewed 22,957 times and 11,744 engaged in likes, comments, shares, etc.
- Alissa Oates, a multiple recipient of the American Society of Interior Designers Rising Star Award has opened a new business on 127 McNeely Circle, Suite B, called Restructure Design. Scott Seeley and Donna Hoffman have joined KVRE 92.9 FM as Promotional Director and Marketing Consultant, and Office Manager and Sales Consultant, respectively.
- The Community Revitalization (CORE) Council, an arm of the Chamber of Commerce, compiled reports on community capital along N Highway 7 from Ouachita National Forest to North McNeely Circle, and from Lockett Mountain Road to Fountain Lake School. The reports reveal the diverse geography, rich history, and unusual features of this area which make it unique.

Hot Springs—Jerry Yeric

- The Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa, an icon of downtown Hot Springs and Arkansas' largest hotel, has been acquired by Sky Capital Group LP of Little Rock in a private transaction with Southwest Hotels Inc., owners and operators of the Arlington since 1954. The purchase includes the Wade Building, which is adjacent to the hotel property on Central Avenue; the Schweer Building, a former car dealership located just north of the Wade that serves as the hotel's parking deck; and a surface parking lot located across Park Ave. It was bought for 25 percent less than market value.
- Hot Springs Board of Directors adopted an ordinance repealing the 90-day moratorium on issuing business licenses for medical marijuana dispensaries and cultivation of facilities during a special called meeting. The unanimous voice vote lifts the moratorium the board effected last month in response to the Arkansas Medical Marijuana Amendment of 2016, or Amendment 98.
- The Hot Springs Board of Directors unanimously adopted a resolution supporting medical marijuana enterprises coming to the corporate limits after imposing a moratorium last month.
- The proposed site of a city water tower in a residential area was removed from consideration, after the Hot Springs Board of Directors granted an appeal that challenged the authorization of constructing a 170 foot tall structure in the neighborhood off Pakis Street.
- An order filled in a local man's federal lawsuit against Hot Springs indicates the city won't enforce the panhandling ordinance at the center of the controversy until the case is resolved. City staff is asking the Hot Springs Board of Directors to repeal the ordinance it adopted in September in response to panhandlers soliciting money from motorists.
- The city of Hot Springs has informed the county it will not provide animal services in the unincorporated area next year unless the county comes up with more money. The county has contracted with the city for animal services since 1999, but city officials have said the county's payment does not provide adequate compensation for the level of service it receives. The county receives 53 percent of the services, a percentage based on the number of animals the city said are brought to its animal shelter from the unincorporated area. The city approved a \$685,000 budget for animal services this year.
- The city and county each adopted a resolution earlier this month in support of federal and state legislation requiring out-of-state retailers to collect and remit sales taxes from online purchases. The resolution, introduced by the Arkansas Municipal League and Association of Arkansas

Counties, calls for local governments to support the Marketplace Fairness Act filed in the U.S. Senate in April. In addition it asks the governor to convene a special legislation session to consider the issue.

- The city is considering reducing the contribution to the county health unit to \$15,000 next year and ending it in 2019. The city might be inclined to continue funding the health unit at current levels if the county reinstates its road millage, which provided the city with about \$350,000 a year for its streets. The county replaced the 1.2 mills it used to levy for roads with a General Fund millage during the 2014, 2015, and 2016 tax years, the proceeds of which have been transferred to the county road fund during each of the three years. County residents urged justices of the peace to continue funding the county health unit at the same level next year amid a looming cut to the city's annual contribution. Garland County Health Unit Administrator Chris Rowland told the Public, Health, Welfare and Safety Committee of the Garland County Quorum Court that the facility at 1425 Malvern Ave. could operate through April or May of next year without \$45,000 the city has historically contributed.

Garland County - Jerry Yeric

- The auction of tax-delinquent properties raised \$1,423,277 for Garland County schools and local governments, the Arkansas commissioner of state land's office announced. Seventy-six bidders vied for 120 parcels sold during the July 6 auction at the Hot Springs Convention Center. In addition to the auction proceeds, the county's taxing entities also benefit from the properties being returned to the tax rolls.
- National Park College was informed it was awarded a federal grant for \$1,287,500 to support students at two local schools. The grant will support the college's Upward Bound program for students grades 9-12 at Hot Springs World Class High School and Mountain Pine High School. The five-year grant will begin on Sept. 1 and will provide \$257,500 each year from the U.S. Department of Education.
- Henderson State University's new executive director of Hot Springs academic initiatives will join the downtown campus on Wednesday. The university hired Tiffany Rogers from the Stuttgart campus of Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas.

Demographics – Lu Otto (See Healthcare and Medical Services report below.)

Healthcare and Medical Services – Richard Johnson

- To date a total of twenty-six individual physicians and healthcare practitioners have been identified who practice in the Hot Springs Village service area. This includes a number of primary care and medical specialists who practice on a part-time or rotating basis. The numbers by specialty or discipline are shown below:
 - 11 - Family Practice/Internal Medicine
 - 6 – Specialists
 - 5 – Dentists
 - 1 – Chiropractor
 - 2 - Physical Therapy and Rehab Services
 - 1 – Psychotherapist
 - 1 - Home Care Service
 - 1 - Skilled Nursing Facility

Information to include their specialty or discipline, location, days and times available, and telephone numbers will be provided for each practice or activity. An additional eight practitioners remain to be contacted.

- Under a separate report, Lu Otto has developed an overview of Village demographics that provides an understanding of current and future Village medical service needs. Lu has addressed the following three key issues in his report:
 - What do studies of Village demographics reveal about the Village market for medical services?
 - What can we learn from age-comparable population studies that inform projected rates of illness and mortality in the Village?
 - What do age-comparable population studies reveal about issues and experiences that likely affect the health and well-being of the Village aged and elderly?

The committee will consolidate the demographic data contained at Lu's report with Population/Physician Ratio data for other communities having similar populations to determine any possible shortfalls in medical coverage at the Village. A list of practitioners and their contact information will be provided as a reference for Village residents. Deadline for completing the final report is August 31st.

Broadband – Greg Jones

- **Gov. Hutchinson Announces High Speed Networks to all Arkansas Public Schools**
(Source: *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 20, 2017)

Gov. Asa Hutchinson says a two-year project to get high-speed internet into all of Arkansas' public schools systems has been completed.

Hutchinson on Thursday announced the completion of the Arkansas Public School Computer Network, the high-speed broadband upgrade for all of the state's K-12 school systems. The project's completion will deliver secure, high-speed broadband to 293 public schools, charter schools, education-service cooperative and telecommunications providers statewide.

Hutchinson's office said Arkansas is one of only six states to achieve at least 100 kilobits per second per student in 100 percent of its school districts. The new network will provide bandwidth speeds to access online courses and online research and internet-based class projects.

Note: This is important progress. Since the schools now have high speed access, the state should be turning its attention to the broader public and the ability for students to have high speed broadband at home. We need to arrange meetings with legislature to express our concerns with the current state of broadband in HSV.

To Close Digital Divide, Microsoft to Harness Unused Television Channels

(Source: *NY Times*, July 11, 2017)

WASHINGTON — Silicon Valley has dreamed up hot air balloons, drones and constellations of mini-satellites to connect the world to the internet. Now Microsoft is adding its own moonshot to solve the digital divide into that mix.

The software giant plans to announce on Tuesday that it is harnessing the unused channels between television broadcasts, known as white spaces, to help get more of rural America online. In an event at the Willard Hotel in Washington, where Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated a

coast-to-coast telephone call a century ago, Microsoft plans to say that it will soon start a white-spaces broadband service in 12 states including Arizona, Kansas, New York and Virginia to connect two million rural Americans in the next five years who have limited or no access to high-speed internet.

In an interview, Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, said white spaces were "the best solution for reaching over 80 percent of people in rural America who lack broadband today."

The United States has long grappled with uneven internet access. Many remote and less-populated areas have had particular trouble obtaining fast internet service because providers often cannot justify the cost of building out infrastructure to isolated locales with few people to serve.

White-spaces technology has emerged as a potential solution to that problem. Since 2008, Microsoft and other companies have been involved in tests of television white spaces for internet access.

Note: While this is generally a PR campaign directed at the FCC to open additional spectrum for wireless internet, this could be an important partner for a company that wants to use this technology to provide wireless service. I expect this will be a chosen technology for smart cities and wide area type services. The technical costs for this type of solution should be lower, but interference may be an issue. Bandwidth may also be limited however in rural areas there is a lot of spectrum whitespace.

- **APSBN (Arkansas Public Safety Broadband Network) Announces it is Joining FirstNet**

FirstNet is a new high speed data network based on existing cellular technology to provide more bandwidth to responders in case of an emergency. It is designed to allocate more bandwidth to first responders and away from cellular users in case of an emergency.

Note: While still in early stages of deployment, AT&T has won this contract for FirstNet from the US Government. In order to win this contract, they had to guarantee much broader cellular coverage especially in rural areas. Given that AR is an early signer, I expect AT&T will be adding towers and bandwidth. This opens an opportunity for wireless internet service in the consumer market since this bandwidth will be available to general users when there is no emergency.

- **Hot Springs Village Coverage Maps** (*Source Broadbandnow.com*)

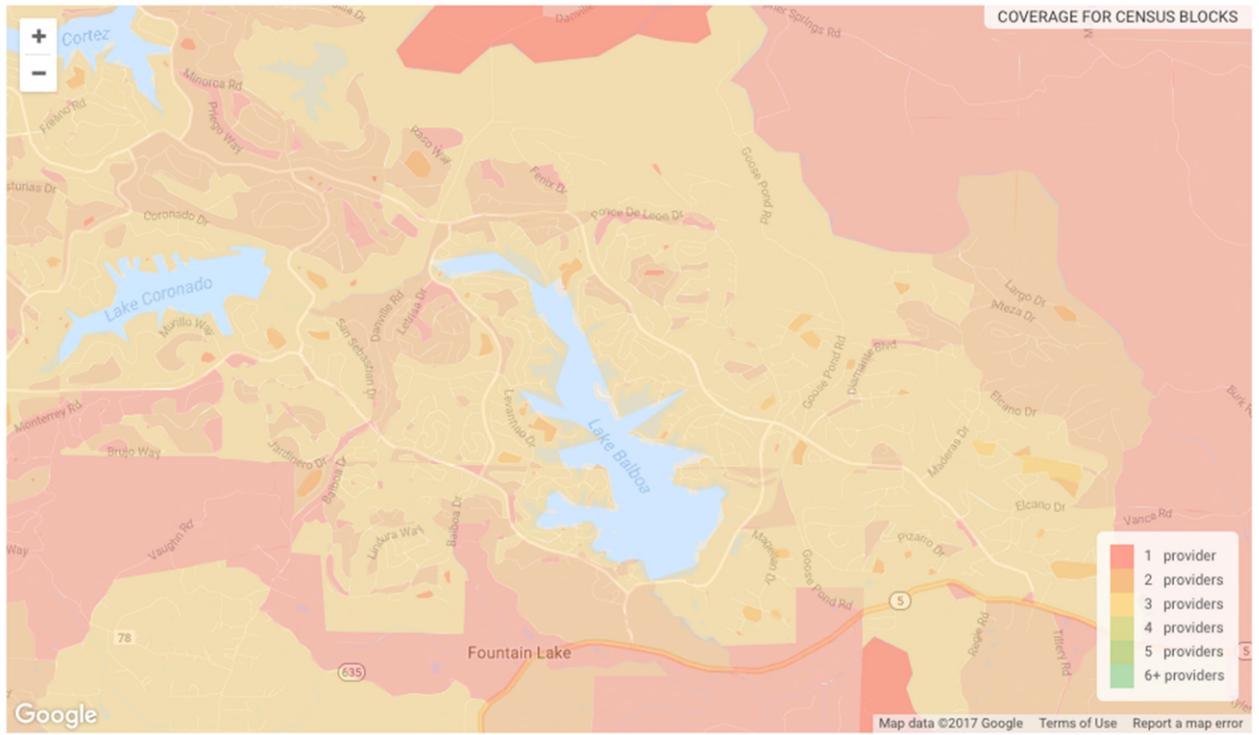
As can be seen on the maps below, there are large areas of HSV that are covered by one or no broadband providers. I want to drill down on this further to understand the actual services available and the available bandwidth. This map would include DSL, u-verse, and wireless (AT&T/Verizon). For a better view of the maps go to:

<http://broadbandnow.com/Arkansas/Hot-Springs-Village?zip=71909#show=competition>

Note that the east side of the village (2nd map) has broader coverage but there are still holes in the coverage.

I can find no wireless broadband carriers that cover the village other than using AT&T or Verizon cellular wireless service.

PROVIDER COMPETITION MAP



PROVIDER COMPETITION MAP

