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Group works with USDA on broadband planning

BY REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

The Edenton Chowan Partnership has been selected to participate in the Cool and Connected Program sponsored by the USDA Rural Utilities Services and the US EPA, according to Larry Lombardi, executive director of the partnership. The program offers plan-



LOMBARDI

ning advice to communities interested in expanding their opportunity to offer broadband capability, Lombardi said during a presentation at the Jan. 10 town council meeting. He

and Chowan County Extension Director Mary Morris successfully prepared the application.

"The Cool and Connected Program is a pilot program that started in the spring of 2016," he said. "We have been selected in phase II of this program and we know we don't have all the answers but we will be working and meeting with

the various stakeholders in the town and surrounding neighborhoods to find out what will work best for our community."

Lombardi said he is already hearing from interested businesses in the community about the program.

"We have heard from various people within our community who are interested in leveraging broadband for

the purpose of enabling the town's main street and our existing neighborhoods to take advantage of broadband services that are already in place or can be put into place using the existing fiber resources already in hand," he said. "The Cool and Connected Program is designed to help us for this purpose and the planning process will help us figure

out our strategy and plan for leveraging broadband to create a great place to live and work," Lombardi added.

At presstime Tuesday, Lombardi had scheduled a teleconference for Tuesday with representatives of Smart Growth America, USDA Rural Utilities Service and the EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities.

MEETING CONSTRUCTION EXPECTATIONS



STAFF PHOTO BY REGGIE PONDER

Construction of Edenton's new police station continues on North Oakum Street. Adam Hughes, project manager for Williamson-based A.R. Chesson Construction, says the station project is on schedule to be completed by May.

Police station on schedule for May completion

BY REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

Work on the new Edenton Police Station on North Oakum Street is proceeding on schedule, according to Adam Hughes, project manager for Williamson-based A.R. Chesson Construction Company which is in charge of building the facility.

"Progress on this project is meeting scheduled expectations and we look forward to a May completion date," Hughes said. "We enjoy occasional visits from Chief (Jay) Fortenbery who maintains a watchful eye over the project to monitor our progress."

Hughes offered the following specifics regarding the work at the site:

■ Site is on grade with most concrete curb and gutter installed and stone subgrade installed in the parking lot

■ Roof membrane is in place and the building is dry, allowing interior rough-ins

■ Plumbing, mechanical and electrical systems all and ceiling rough-ins are underway and approximately 60 percent complete

"Local building officials have been extremely helpful coordinating required inspections allowing us to begin insulation and dry-

wall in completed areas, facilitating our aggressive construction schedule," Hughes said.

■ Brick veneer is currently being installed and is approximately 64 percent complete

"The exterior finishes should be finished by the end of February provided we continue to enjoy this relatively mild winter weather," Hughes said.

■ Windows are being fabricated and are scheduled for a March installation

■ Interior finishes for paint, flooring and casework are almost finalized

■ Site improvements such as grading, asphalt paving and land-

scaping will begin in March and be completed in mid-April.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said her staff has been attending monthly construction progress meetings with representatives from the contractor and architect.

"I am pleased with the progress being made," she said.

"There is a lot of coordination required by the Town due to some cost saving measures, and I am pleased that our work is progressing according to schedule also," Knighton added.

The cost saving measures being put in place, she said, involve such measures as having Town

Purchasing Agent Bud Powell and Police Chief Jay Fortenbery work on the bids for the purchase of the office furniture that will be housed in the building.

"This task would have been more expensive if the contractor and architect did the work," the town manager said. "The Electric Department has done some work too to help reduce costs."

Knighton said that another bright spot in the process has been the "great support" from Chowan County's Information Technology staff in helping the town with such items as data lines, fiber, the phone system and other similar components.

Yeopim solar farm permit OK'd

BY REGGIE PONDER
Editor

The Chowan County Planning Board voted unanimously last week to approve a special use permit for a solar farm on Yeopim Road.

The permit for O2emc's solar farm at 740 Yeopim Road includes six conditions, including one intended to ensure the facility has no negative effect on already compromised drainage in the area.

The company plans a 10-megawatt solar farm on the 177-acre tract.

Speaking at the planning board hearing on the

permit application, Yates Parrish, who owns land bordering the site on two sides, said he was concerned that the project would make water drain faster and cause flooding on the road and on the farmland in the area worse than it is now.

"That's my main concern," Parrish said.

Amber Winslow, who lives across the street from the solar farm site, said she already has a terrible drainage problem at her house.

"We're going to have more of a problem than we have now" once the solar farm is built, Winslow said. "If that is going to drain more water faster than I am going to have to move."

Henry Campen, a Raleigh attorney representing O2emc, told the board that the drainage issues

are caused by the topography in the area and have nothing to do with the solar farm.

Campen questioned O2emc executive Adam Foodman about the drainage issues.

Foodman said the land was already cleared and the company would be planting ground cover.

He said he agreed with neighboring property owners in wanting the best drainage possible.

"We are not adding impervious surface," Foodman said, explaining that is what would make flooding worse.

Foodman agreed to a condition that he maintain ditches at the site in a manner consistent with requirements of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

That condition was attached to the permit

that was approved by the board.

Two other neighboring property owners, Belinda and Richard Jackson, expressed concerns about the disposal of materials after the facility stops producing electricity.

They also raised a concern about the possibility of groundwater contamination as a result of materials in the solar panels.

Campen said the issues raised by adjoining property owners were speculative concerns about what might happen rather than evidence that would contradict the expert testimony that witnesses for O2emc had presented.

Witnesses for the company said that there would be no threat of hazardous material contamination and that the materials

Input sought on land use plan

BY REGGIE PONDER
Editor

A meeting next week will offer you an opportunity to weigh in on future land uses in Edenton and Chowan County.

The company assisting town and county officials with the preparation of a new land use plan will hold an open house Feb. 9 at the county's Public Safety Center.

The meeting will be held from 4-7 p.m. The building is located on Freemason Street.

Although wind energy facilities will not be the only topic of discussion, there will be an opportunity to discuss the wind energy controversy at the meeting, according to Chad Mead-

ows of Codewright, the firm providing assistance to local officials in preparing the new plan.

Meadows explained that the open house will feature separate areas dedicated to the town and county plans, so residents and property owners can select either one - or both - based on their interests.

Staff from Codewright will make an opening presentation about the land use plan, including data on demographics, economics and land use.

The company will talk about why the county and town are updating the land use plan - what they hope to accomplish in the planning process.

See SOLAR, 4A

See INPUT, 4A

