



HSVPOA GAC Quarterly Report by Greg Jones on 10-20-21

Description

Greg Jones, Chair of the Hot Springs Village Property Owners' Association Governmental Affairs Committee (GAC), gave the quarterly committee report to the Board on October 20, 2021.

Good morning. You should have received a report that I sent, as well to the Board earlier this week.

The Governmental Affairs Committee, of course, is a strategic committee of the Board that focuses on the external interfaces between Hot Springs Village and our surrounding communities.

We have several current topics of focus, which we discussed in our last update. I just wanted to give you a little update of some of the outcomes that we've had from those topics of focus over the last few months.

Legislative Affairs

On Legislative Affairs, during the past six months, we've been successful in working with the legislature to allow Hot Springs Village to participate in broadband funding initiatives.

This likely paves the way for us to make inroads on other state-wide funding initiatives in the future. Now we've kind of cracked the door open with this one. Many of you know, we've been told many times that we can't get state funds for basically anything. And I think we have kind of opened that door a little bit. We do recommend that the Board, and that Staff be engaged, specifically in lobbying and legislative affairs in addition to the volunteer work we're doing on our committee. I believe that we have a significant opportunity with the state, certainly with a lot of the broadband and other infrastructure funds that are going to be allocated by the federal government. The State of Arkansas is not going to know what to do with all that money. We live here in the State of Arkansas; we should be entitled to some of that money, as well, for our infrastructure, sewers, roads, etc. But we need to

actively lobby with our state senators, legislators, our federal government people, in order for us to make sure that we have access to that. That will require a concentrated effort, I believe by the POA, itself, to go after some of those funds. But I do believe we have kind of at least opened the door, by what we started with the broadband and got that passed through the legislature. We've never had any opportunity to do this in the past. So that is one of the things we have been focused on with the legislative affairs.

Broadband

Broadband, you heard from John Paul about the good work that is happening with First Electric. We've had others as well. Aristotle Communications, with wireless broadband, also looked at doing some things on the Saline County side. Unfortunately, they were not successful with the state in terms of getting grant money to build the wireless system that they wanted to build there.

Luckily, First Electric is very interested and is building a state-wide network for all of their customers. The challenge that we have here in the Village – they don't have customers in Garland County. And we span two different counties. So we are at risk of having people in Saline County have gigabit or better service at every residence and business in Saline County and not having service at residences and businesses in Garland County. We really need to focus on the Garland County side and work with the Garland County Quorum Court and other governmental officials in Garland County to see what we can do to try to get some services out here on the Garland County side.

As you know, I participated in the Broadband Committees in the City of Hot Springs. We were successful at bringing Ritter Communications to Hot Springs, which is a fiber optic network provider. We need to work with Garland County, the city, folks on that side, to see if we can't be successful in maybe either bringing Ritter out here or getting Cablelynx to increase their cable service for broadband services out here as well. I think that's going to be important for us, moving us next year, as First Electric starts their buildout in Saline County, trying to figure out what we are going to do with our residents that live on the Garland County side.

Healthcare

Healthcare – we've been very focused on healthcare resources. There's been some news recently about the walk-in clinic at CHI, over here, has not been open. I have not followed up on that, yet. Our person on our committee, that was focused on healthcare and did our **Healthcare Resources Directory**, which you published, has since resigned from the committee due to some personal issues. So we're looking for someone else to pick up that banner on our committee and start focusing again on healthcare resources for Villagers. Obviously very critical for our population out here in the Village.

Economic Development

Economic Development – we came to you last time about funding an Economic Impact Study. That impact study was commissioned at ULAR and is already underway. We provide a lot of information that they needed to put together with the census information that they had and the information from the school districts. It is running slightly behind schedule. Everyone's stressed and doesn't have enough staff. So they have been unable to get some of the information they need from the state to complete our Economic Impact Study. But I expect that will be done within the next quarter or so. That's a valuable tool to us here in the Village, especially as we start to go out and talk to legislators about why it is important that they work with us here in the Village. We have a significant voting block and we need to exercise some of that power.

Education

Education, as you know, we are home to about 800 school children from both Fountain Lake and Jessieville. We're always working with the school districts to find ways to be helpful in what we can do to help them and their students.

Many of you may have seen all the press coverage, the newspaper coverage, that my restaurant chain, where we have implemented kind of a high school work program, where we actually pay our high school students to come in early and study. We have great internet in our locations, luckily. So we pay them to come in early. We feed them. And then they start work. It's been a great thing for us in terms of staffing. We've received tremendous amount of news coverage. We've been featured – they did a lead story for us on KARK on Friday night on the news. We've been on over 130 websites this weekend. Yahoo News front page. And today we were on Fox and Friends, nationwide, this morning. So, great coverage. A way for us to really get out and talk about Hot Springs Village, as well. I already had someone call the restaurant from New Jersey, saying they loved our program. They saw us this morning on the news. They are going to go on vacation this coming summer and they are coming to Hot Springs Village because they want to come to our restaurant.

All those things are great things, I think. And we will continue to work with the school districts on what we can do to help with our students and help them get valuable jobs and learn valuable work skills, which is even more important.

Development

On Development, that is a new area of focus that we just started working on this year. We've had actually quite a few speakers come to talk to us about various developments.

We had Judge Arey, just about a month ago, come talk to us about the new Southwest Trail, which is the bike and hike trail that is going to go from Little Rock to Hot Springs and about the economic impact they feel that trail is going to have, both kind of in the people

that are going to go from one end to the other, but more importantly, in the urban areas and the suburbs where those trails will go through. They are already seeing people saying that when they look at what's happened with the trails like up in Bentonville and Northwest Arkansas, the majority of people that use those trails only use them for a mile or a mile and a half. But they get on it and they ride a bike to get a hamburger. They ride a bike to school. They go out and walk the trail for exercise within their local area. So, while it will be a big economic development for the region, from Little Rock all the way to Hot Springs, certainly will be a big boon to certain areas where the trail actually goes through.

Unfortunately, it doesn't really come very close to us. It runs down Highway 70. That's really the closest to us. But there may be opportunities for us to find ways to connect to that at some point in the future.

It is being completely funded by grants. There is no local money actually going into those trail pieces. It's going to be a great development. The trail is absolutely fabulous and they're renovating that old historic bridge over the Saline River in Benton as part of that trail. They even took it apart and sent pieces to Michigan or somewhere to have it refurbished. So that is going to be great up there.

Public Awareness

Public Awareness is another area where the GAC is focused and we get a lot of coverage in the local newspaper. Pretty much every meeting we are on the front page of the following paper because we do have great speakers. We do talk about positive things about the Village. We really try to promote the Village in every way that we can across the entire community and that goes through all of our, you know, the city, county, local chamber of commerce, school districts, everyone, participates as part of our committee. That really, I think, brings a really good view of Hot Springs Village to our local community and that's really part of what we focus on in Governmental Affairs [Committee].

That's kind of what we've been up to for the last few months. We're always looking for new committee members. We have a couple of openings now, as well. We're always looking for people to join our committee that are willing to jump into one of these focus areas and take a lead point on some of these areas. That's all for my report. I will be glad to answer any questions anyone might have.

There were no questions.

Transcribed by Cheryl Dowden, October 28, 2021.

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