

Minimal at best

Polk realtor says lack of Internet causing loss of home sales

By Leah Justice
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COLUMBUS—The Polk County Board of Commissioners heard a plea this week from a realtor who says the lack of Internet and Windstream in particular dropping services when a home sells is making it difficult to sell homes in the county.

The Polk County Board of Commissioners met Monday night and heard from Remax realtor Laura Weicker.

Weicker said concerning Windstream Communications, there are some serious issues in this county. She said data coming through is "minimal at best" and when homes are being sold, Windstream will either not transfer the account or drop the service altogether. She said some sellers have had to keep the account in their name and be paid through the buyer to keep the service.

"This needs to be investigated and something needs to be done about it," Weicker said.

She said realtors are receiving more and more complaints every day and there are more and more people working from home so the service is vital.

Commissioner Paul Beiler asked if the issue is spread out all over the county.

Weicker said there was one at Hogback, one at Lake Lanier and another in Mill Spring. She said over the weekend Windstream refused to transfer the

service after they had promised to transfer the service.

Commissioner Ray Gasperson said the digital divide in Polk County is becoming severe, particularly in the rural areas. He said that will be his focus for the next year as commissioner. He suggested the county approve a resolution and ask Windstream how they can improve their service. He suggested receiving public comment on the issue.

"The digital divide gets worse and worse," Gasperson said.

He said with home sales, the county is going to get real estate deals that fall apart because of Internet.

"We already are," Weicker said.

County Manager Marche Pittman said the issue is not just with Windstream. He said the county gets calls about AT&T as well. Pittman said the county invested \$10,000 last year with Rutherford County and Pangaea and wants them to come back to the board. He said the county definitely needs to put the study on the agenda in the near future.

Gasperson said he would like for that to be put on the county's next agenda.

"I think it should be a standing committee on this board where we are meeting regularly on that," Gasperson said.

Weicker said the county is losing vital business people coming into this area.



"Even in downtown Tryon there are issues," Weicker said. "Charter has some of the same issues."

Chairman Myron Yoder said he and Gasperson just talked about the issue after the last meeting and he can assure people commissioners agree with their sentiments.

Commissioner David Moore said he has AT&T and his family spends more time resetting the Internet than they spend using it. He also said he spoke to one person whose mother has Life Alert that works off the Internet and she keeps falling.

"It's a dire need," Moore said.

Yoder said he can assure Weicker commissioners are working on the issue and thinks she is exactly right, that the county is losing business.

Pittman said companies see Internet as a business, in that they are either making money or not.

"We are starting to see Internet as a utility; like water, sewer, electrical," Pittman said, and the industry hasn't caught up with that, in my opinion."

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