



Supervisor Tony Buffington Blue Ridge District NewsFlash



Rural Broadband Expansion Update

Sent: September 15, 2020



Loudoun Broadband Access ~~Could~~ ^{WILL} Extend West!!!

Asking Sen. Kaine to amend federal grant laws to ensure Loudoun qualifies to receive broadband expansion infrastructure funding.

Photo credit: Loudoun Now. Subtitle edited by Supervisor Buffington's office.

Expansion of high speed internet access throughout rural Loudoun has always been a priority for my office. But with 100% virtual schooling and so many of our residents teleworking, **it's now a TOP PRIORITY!**

We've come a long way since 2016...

- Board adoption of first ever Broadband Strategic Plan for expansion of rural broadband.
- \$5 Million for secure in-ground-fiber connections to rural LCPS owned schools and facilities.
- \$16 Million for 140 mile secure in-ground-fiber connections to rural County owned facilities, plus separate privately accessible in-ground "middle mile" rural fiber loop to reduce costs and incentivize new "last mile" connections to rural homes and businesses.
- 50% business personal property tax reduction to incentivize private expansion of rural wireless coverage.
- Zoning and other amendments to streamline processes for rural broadband expansion.
- Extensive state and federal lobbying efforts for helpful legislation and better access to rural broadband expansion funding.
- Free public WiFi to rural library and school parking lots.
- My office's work with individual residents and private service providers has resulted in hundreds of new connections to rural homes and businesses.

But we still have a long way to go, and my office is pushing harder than ever to get us there!

Further Action Tonight!

Board Member Initiative for Emergency Broadband Implementation Plan

While we've made a lot of progress in the last 5 years, I know that we still have a long way to go.

With LCPS's decision to implement 100% virtual learning and the fact that 21% of LCPS students reside in rural Loudoun, Supervisor Kershner, Chair Randall and I are proposing a new initiative at tonight's Board meeting that, if passed by the Board, will direct county staff to bring forward additional options for prioritizing and accelerating the expansion of broadband services to residential areas with currently unserved and underserved LCPS students.

For more information about tonight's effort, click [here](#), then select:

- 2020
- 09-15-20 Business Meeting
- Item 16 BMI - Emergency Broadband Implementation Plan .pdf

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUSINESS MEETING
BOARD MEMBER INITIATIVE**

SUBJECT: Emergency Broadband Implementation Plan

ELECTION DISTRICTS: Blue Ridge/Catoctin

CRITICAL ACTION DATE: At the pleasure of the Board

STAFF CONTACTS: Stacy Carey, Chief of Staff, Supervisor Caleb Kershner
Rachael Holmes, Chief of Staff, Supervisor Tony Buffington
Jeanine Arnett, Chief of Staff, Chair At-Large Phyllis Randall

PURPOSE: The purpose of the item is to expedite the deployment of broadband to underserved and unserved areas of Western Loudoun County as identified in the 2014 Wireless Gap Analysis.

RECOMMENDATION: Supervisor Kershner, Supervisor Buffington and Chair Randall recommend that staff analyze options one through five, and return to the October 20, 2020, Board of Supervisors (Board) Business Meeting with options to prioritize and accelerate the expansion of broadband services to residential areas with underserved Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) students and families that could be connected in a timely manner.

BACKGROUND: The Commonwealth of Virginia is currently operating under a state of emergency due to COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on Loudoun County has highlighted the

History of Blue Ridge District Action To Ensure Broadband Access for All

While my office has been extremely focused on broadband since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been a top priority for us since taking office in 2016. Here's a list of some of our progress:

- July 2016: Board approved amendments to streamline administrative processes for certain types of telecommunications antennas and facilities related to wireless small cell deployment.
- July 2016: Board approved zoning amendments in Rural Hamlet and Rural Village zoning districts to add telecommunications antennas and monopoles of limited height as permitted or special exception uses.
- September 2016: Board officially adds expansion of broadband and cellular coverage throughout western Loudoun as a goal.
- March 2017: Board directs County staff to develop and present to the Board, a Broadband Strategic Plan for increasing broadband coverage throughout western Loudoun.
- Annually since 2016: Board approved Legislative Agenda Items supporting state initiatives to provide localities with additional authority regarding rural broadband expansion initiatives.
- November 2017: Board sought and gained improvements to Virginia's Department of Historic Resources Review Committee response times for review of service provider applications.
- January 2018: Board unanimously approved Supervisor Buffington's motion to cut Loudoun's business personal property tax rate on wireless broadband equipment by 50% in order to attract new wireless providers and incentivize existing providers to expand coverage.
- April 2018: Board approved \$5 million (\$1.5 in FY19, \$1.75 in FY20, \$1.75 in FY21) for LCPS Broadband expansion project to provide in-ground-fiber connections to LCPS's western Loudoun schools and facilities.
- June 2018: Board approves Supervisor Buffington's motion to adopt Loudoun's first ever Broadband Strategic Plan.
- November 2018: Board initiates Broadband Study to explore potential costs for connecting County facilities with a private Wide-Area-Network to reduce costs for the provision of Internet access, and for the identification of costs, alternatives, and funding options, for the provision of broadband internet services to unserved and underserved areas of rural Loudoun County.
- July 2019: Board approves Supervisor Buffington's motion directing staff to work through upcoming budget processes to identify funding and procurement options through a public/private partnership for

deployment of a 140 mile middle-mile fiber network, to connect 60 key County owned facilities throughout western Loudoun at a cost of \$16.1 million, using a private third party provider who will own and operate the new in-ground fiber network. This network would bring in-ground fiber much closer to western Loudoun residents and businesses who need it, thereby incentivizing internet providers to serve new customers by greatly reducing their cost of doing so.

- October 2019: Supervisor Buffington asks Senator Tim Kaine to commit to amending current federal broadband grant laws in order to ensure that Loudoun becomes qualified to receive them.
- December 2019: Board approved \$15,481,205 contract with Lumos Networks (Segra) over the next 9 years (2020-2029) to connect Loudoun County government owned facilities throughout western Loudoun with new in-ground broadband fiber. Segra also required to install an additional strand of in-ground-fiber for use by private service providers to reduce costs for connecting more residents and businesses throughout western Loudoun.

In closing, my office has been and will remain dedicated to the expansion of broadband services to unserved and underserved areas of rural Loudoun County because I know that access to high speed broadband is critical to you and your family's quality of life and ability to effectively work, learn and explore from home.

As always, I'll keep you updated as additional progress is made.

Coronavirus - We're in it together, we'll get through it together - Tony

Be safe!



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