



Supervisor Tony Buffington
Blue Ridge District
NewsFlash



Broadband Expansion Update

Updated status of Loudoun County's Broadband expansion efforts

Sent: February 4, 2021

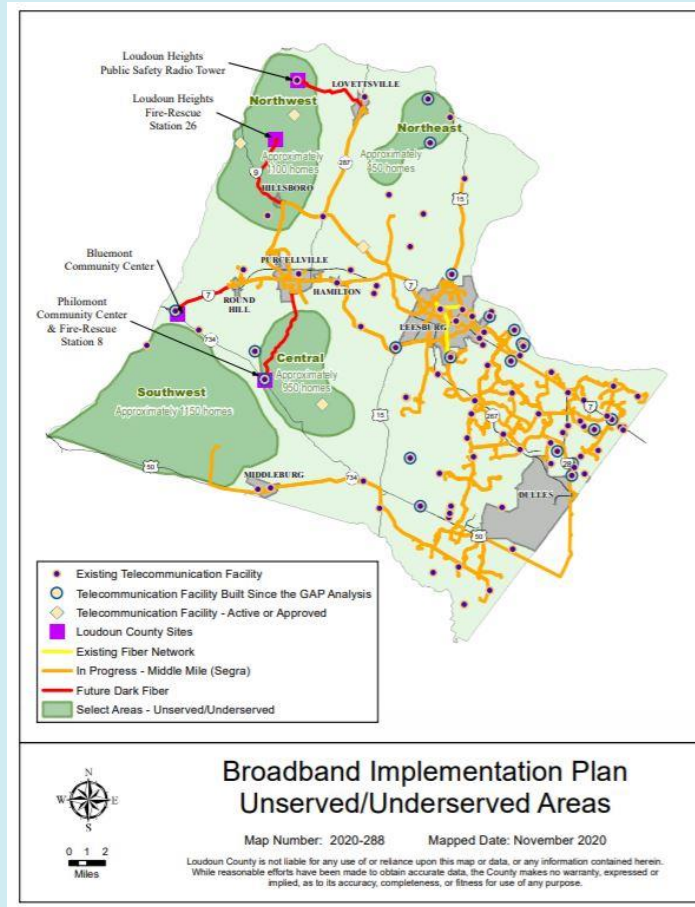
LATEST BROADBAND EXPANSION EFFORTS

Emergency Broadband Initiative Continues to Make Progress

Broadband is no longer a nice convenience - it is a much needed necessity! We learned long ago that we can no longer wait on private industry alone to expand broadband to unserved and underserved areas of our County, because it will never make financial sense for private providers to fund the infrastructure needed to service households in these areas.

For this reason, myself, Supervisor Kershner (Catoclin District) and Chair Randall (At-Large) have been leading local government efforts to facilitate delivery of broadband solutions to underserved and unserved portions of Loudoun. **Our goal is to connect currently unserved County owned facilities, while providing the infrastructure necessary to reduce costs and increase the likelihood of private industry connections for as many currently unserved and underserved residents and businesses as possible.**

On November 17, 2020, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed the Emergency Broadband Implementation Plan brought forward by Supervisor Kershner, Chair Randall and myself to



enhance ongoing efforts to expand access to broadband throughout rural Loudoun.

As part of the plan, staff is now providing regular quarterly updates on the status of the County's effort to provide reliable broadband access throughout western Loudoun. On February 2, 2021, we received our first quarterly update from staff and I'm happy to report that while we have a ways to go, we are making good progress.

See below for updated status' of six actions that the Board directive staff to complete:

Action 1: Waive pre-application (PRAP) requirements in order to reduce development application timelines for telecommunications facilities.

Status: COMPLETE!!! Pre-Application meetings (PRAPs) are no longer mandatory for legislative telecommunications facility applications and are now optional.

Action 2: Direct staff to bring forward amendments to the Land Development Applications Fee Schedule to eliminate the Special Exception (SPEX) fees and establish a uniform \$6,990 Commission Permit (CMPT) fee for all new telecommunications uses in identified underserved areas.

Status: The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is currently coordinating with the County Attorney's Office on the best way to implement the Board's directive to establish a uniform land development application fee of \$6,990 for legislative telecommunications facility applications in underserved areas. Preliminary discussions suggest a Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ZOAM) is required to achieve the task. An item is anticipated to come before the Board in March 2021 as the next step.

Action 3: Establish a Telecommunications Application Ombudsman program.

Status: The Board moved to establish a telecommunications application ombudsman, however, a staff person within a community

development department has not yet been designated. Community development leadership will convene to discuss the matter.

Action 4: Institute Telecommunications Application Assistance Meetings as a standard part of the applications process for a telecommunications use.

Status: A formal application assistance meeting process (with LMIS/LOLA application number) has not been established. However, should a new application be submitted before a formal process is established, staff from the DPZ Customer Service Center, Building and Development (B&D) Engineering Division, and B&D Permitting Division, would offer an informal interdepartmental assistance meeting to the applicant. A team of staff members have already been identified to participate in these meetings.

Action 5: Execute a budget adjustment to move \$191,000 from the IT Contingency project in the Capital Projects fund to the Remote Site Connectivity Project in the Capital Projects Fund for purposes of beginning the Request for Proposal (RFP) Process to obtain a vendor to build additional fiber connections to the below listed five remaining county facilities:

- Bluemont Community Center
- Philomont Community Center
- Philomont Fire and Rescue
- Loudoun Heights Fire and Rescue
- Loudoun Heights Public Safety Radio Tower

Status: The budget adjustment was executed in December 2020, and funding is available for the purpose of beginning the RFP process. The FY 2022 Proposed Capital Improvement Program, which will be proposed by the County Administrator on February 10, 2021, will include a proposal to accelerate funding from FY 2023 through FY 2025 to FY 2022 to provide broadband infrastructure to the five remaining County sites that are not included in the current Segra middle mile contract. Information Technology (IT) has worked with the Department of Finance and Budget (DFB) Procurement Division to finalize an agreement with an experienced consultant to compile and

complete the Remote Site Connectivity RFPA formal kickoff to discuss project timing with the consultant is planned for the first week of February.

Action 6: Provide the Board with quarterly updates beginning in January 2021 regarding progress on broadband initiatives identified in the November 17, 2020 item.

a. Segra's efforts to attract and contract with last mile providers:

- **Status:** Segra has currently signed multiple non-disclosure agreements with potential broadband providers/partners to serve communities in the western part of Loudoun County. Conversations are ongoing for wireless and fiber-to-the-home hybrid solutions; however, focus for potential service expansion projects has shifted to the Phase 2 lines that would be delivered with the future Dark Fiber RFP.

b. Applicability of HB2141 to Loudoun County:

- **Status:** Authorizes a local governing body, with respect to a service district, to contract with a nongovernmental broadband service provider who will construct, maintain, and own communications facilities and equipment required to facilitate delivery of last-mile broadband services to unserved areas of the service district, provided that the locality documents that less than 10 percent of residential and commercial units within the project area are capable of receiving broadband service at the time the construction project is approved by the locality. Broadband, as defined by HB2141, is "Internet access at speeds greater than 10 Mbps download speed and one Mbps upload speed." The official FCC broadband definition is "a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload." Although this provision does allow for the County to create a service district for broadband, there is no taxing mechanism to recover costs like other service district provisions. Staff is communicating with existing franchisees to determine their plans for future telecommunication applications in unserved or underserved

broadband areas/communities for consideration as part of land development applications. While these providers' plans are considered proprietary and strategic, staff are working to find locations that would be mutually beneficial.

c. Funding sources available to support broadband initiatives including grant opportunities:

- **Status:** 2022 Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant application dates and deadlines are dependent on award announcement for the 2021 round of VATI grant applications. All 2021 applicants were recently provided the opportunity to rescope and the deadline for applicants to submit their rescoped projects is February 8th, 2021, with final awards coming after that date. Staff has begun initial cross-department conversations, to determine roles, responsibilities, and functions, as well as the process components required to make a comprehensive submission. The VATI timeline and major milestones staff are currently working towards are outlined below:

January	Begin project description
January	Identify vendor(s) who will be a co-applicant
February	Finalize vendor choice
March	Identify <i>at least</i> 20% match
April	Present match request to Board (if needed)
May	Complete maps
May	Complete "passing form"
April – July	Regular meetings with co-applicant
June	Assign writing tasks
July	Finalize Notice of Application
July	Complete all sections of grant narrative.
August	Grant application summary form due to Management Analyst
August	Deputy CFO signs grant application summary form
August	Application Deadline

- Grant opportunities require a private partner willing to fund and complete the construction required to deliver service. Staff is communicating with existing franchisees to

determine their plans for future telecommunication applications in unserved or underserved broadband areas/communities for consideration as part of land development applications. Staff are also working to gather information from nonfranchisees as potential co-applicants, and have engaged the Loudoun Broadband Alliance (LBA) to support the efforts for expanded partnerships. Potential coapplicants include entities already serving Loudoun County as well as providers not yet with a presence. While these providers' plans are considered proprietary and strategic, staff are working to find locations that would be mutually beneficial. Staff also considered potential funding through the Coronavirus Relief Fund, but did not have the ability to meet the December 31, 2020 deadline requirements for construction.

d. Partnership opportunities with power utilities for broadband expansion.

- **Status:** Staff is currently coordinating internally regarding this area. Additionally, staff are currently reviewing applications from candidates for the Broadband Program Manager position in the Department of Information Technology outlined in the November 17, 2020h Information Item. Responsibilities of this position will include leading efforts for the Phase 2 Dark Fiber RFP expansion, as well as identifying new broadband opportunities, including with power utilities.

e. Other initiatives:

- **Status:** Leveraging CARES Act funding, Wi-Fi expansion for public use was completed in December 2020 to cover parking areas at the Loudoun Valley Community Center. This is similar to the WiFi expansion at Loudoun County Libraries earlier in 2020 to encourage residents who have no reliable internet service to use the free Wi-Fi to access

the internet for information about COVID-19 and conduct other essential online business.

PREVIOUS BROADBAND EXPANSION EFFORTS



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



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

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 HISTORY OF MY OFFICE'S BROADBAND EXPANSION EFFORTS

- 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.

As always, my office remains dedicated to the expansion of broadband services to unserved and underserved areas of rural Loudoun because I know that access to high speed broadband is critical to your family's quality of life and ability to effectively work, learn and explore from home.



I'll keep you updated as additional progress is made!

Tony Buffington
Blue Ridge District Supervisor
tony.buffington@loudoun.gov

Rachael Holmes
Chief of Staff
rachael.e.holmes@loudoun.gov

Robin Bartok
Legislative Aide
robin.w.bartok@loudoun.gov

Katie Patru
Legislative Aide

katie.patru@loudoun.gov

Click [here](#) to Like us on Facebook!



Disclaimer: Supervisor Buffington and his staff make every effort to share accurate, timely, relevant and helpful information; however, he nor his staff are liable for inaccuracies, errors, omissions, misrepresentations or otherwise unhelpful or harmful information. The sharing of third party non-County affiliated information is not an endorsement of such information and he nor his staff are liable for inaccuracies, errors, omissions, misrepresentations, or otherwise unhelpful or harmful information from the sharing of such third party non-County affiliated information. Use of the information shared by Supervisor Buffington and his staff is at sole discretion of the user(s), and user(s) accepts all liability and responsibility for his/her/their actions regarding use of the information shared.

Blue Ridge District | 1 Harrison Street, S.E. 5th Floor, PO Box 70000, Leesburg, VA 20177-7000

Customer Contact Data Notice

Sent by tony.buffington@loudoun.gov powered by



Try email marketing for free today!