



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Local Units of Government

On September 15, 2021, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved up to \$15,472,270 to address broadband needs countywide, specifically infrastructure, affordability, literacy, and access concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic made the importance of having access to high-speed broadband internet extremely clear. Individuals and families need it to go to school, work remotely, connect with friends and family, and access critical services. The investment made by the Board of Commissioners will expand high-speed broadband internet infrastructure to all households in the county and has also set aside dollars to address concerns related to internet affordability, literacy, and access.

“Allocating funds to make broadband available to all Washtenaw County residents is a transformational moment for our community,” said Jason Maciejewski, County Commissioner for District 1. “Telehealth services, educational access, work-from-home and the ability to accomplish everyday tasks online will become available no matter where you live.”

A substantial portion of this investment will go to expanding broadband infrastructure to every address in Washtenaw County. Recent grants from the state and federal government have helped reduce the number of unconnected households to approximately 3,300. To close the rest of this gap, the Board authorized using up to \$4,890,757 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, \$1,000,000 from the County General Fund, and \$8,781,513 of recovered lost revenues. This \$14,672,270 investment sets Washtenaw County up to become one of the first counties in the state to fully bridge the digital divide. County staff will work closely with internet services providers over the coming years to ensure fiscal responsibility and transparency as these funds are implemented.

“Having broadband infrastructure is extremely important, but just having the infrastructure is not good enough if you can’t afford or don’t know how to use it,” said Katie Scott, County Commissioner for District 9. “Knowing that access to broadband has been deemed a public health priority, our goal as a Commission is to ensure nothing stands in the way of our residents from being able to take advantage of high speed internet, whether it’s physical infrastructure, cost, or technical know-how.”

To achieve this goal, the Board allocated an additional \$800,000 to broadly address internet affordability, literacy, and access concerns. At the 9/15 meeting where this resolution was approved, several Commissioners committed to closely monitoring the usage of these funds and potentially increasing them as needed. Over the coming weeks, the county will communicate specifically how this \$800,000 investment will be targeted.

The resolution also instructed County Administration to begin exploring other funding opportunities to hopefully reimburse this initial investment in broadband, including, but not

limited to a potential federal infrastructure bill. If reimbursed, this would allow ARPA funds to be reinvested for other eligible uses.

“Allocating \$15.5 million to expand broadband infrastructure and address internet affordability, literacy, and access was a big ask,” said Shannon Beeman, Commissioner for District 3, “We had some difficult conversations but maintained open lines of communication, which got us to where we are today. There’s still a lot of work to do, but getting this far is a huge accomplishment. It’s a great feeling to know how many lives are going to be positively impacted.”

A timeline for activity thus far is as follows:

- November/December 2021 | Legal counsel developed draft service contracts for each service vendor, Taskforce leadership and County staff reviewed, provided feedback. Final drafts to be shared and discussed on January 7, 2022
- December 6, 2021 | Project Manager work awarded to DCS Technology Design
- October 11, 2021 | Contract issued for legal counsel specializing in governmental telecommunications services to develop and negotiate contracts with awarded service providers
- October 7, 2021 | RFP issued for a Project Manager
- September 28, 2021 | Award letters were issued to Comcast, Midwest Energy Cooperative, Spectrum and Washtenaw Fiber Properties
- September 15, 2021 | ARPA allocations authorized by the Board of Commissioners
- June 9, 2021 | Bids received from Comcast, Midwest Energy Cooperative, Spectrum and Washtenaw Fiber Properties
- May 2021 | Broadband Task Force Chair Barb Fuller offered public comment at Working Session meeting, asking the Board of Commissioners to consider the allocation of ARP funding to achieve countywide broadband equity
- May 2021 | RFP 8119 issued – seeking public/private partnership to achieve 100% broadband equity in Washtenaw County
“Washtenaw County seeks proposals for the deployment of infrastructure that will provide affordable, equitable, high-speed broadband access to all residents, businesses, and anchor institutions in unserved areas of the County and support economic development. The County understands that supplementary funding will be required to fill today’s service gaps and intends to secure such funding, including by providing potential County funds and by working with respondents to seek grant funding. The County will be guided in its decisions by the recommendations of its Broadband Task Force.”
- April 2021 | BBTF Update to BOC Working Session
- January 2021 | Release Final Report, Grant #7914
- October 22, 2020 | BBTF Update to BOC and Pre-Engineering Final Report released <https://dcstechnology-my.sharepoint.com/:f/p/clscharrer/EsGZUkz5NfxBhVByj9AdbCgB4Nd949W7SmbogijG65W9Tw?e=rGnx3v>
- August 2020 | Anticipating the continuation of online instruction for students due to the pandemic, the BBTF provided parking lot WiFi internet connections to seven township halls in under- and un-served areas of the county where parking lot WiFi access did not exist. Back-To-School Hotspots Summary posted at www.washtenaw.org/broadband
- June 26, 2020 | Grant Award #7914 issued to perform pre-engineering of a broadband network, prepare for anticipated grant funding opportunities, perform financial modeling

to demonstrate financial feasibility, and assist in selecting a private partner as the grant applicant

- January 2020 | The BBTF, in partnership with Merit, conducted a 33,000 parcel, 15 township survey to establish accurate, granular coverage data needed to pursue state and federal grant opportunities.
Exec. Summary, Final Report and Power Point Presentation posted at www.washtenaw.org/broadband

Washtenaw County is actively working with the awarded vendors to negotiate contractual agreements, the expected timeline is:

- January 2022 | Contract executed with DCS Technology Design for Project Manager services
- January 2022 | DCS Technology Design will be working with the Broadband Taskforce to familiarize themselves with work completed to date and next steps. Will be a member of the contract negotiations team with the four service providers. DCS reports to County Administration
- January 2022 | Broadband infrastructure contracts issued to the four service providers
- January 2022 | Contract negotiations with the Broadband Infrastructure providers will begin
- February 2022 | Goal: Contracts executed with all service providers

The timeline will continue to evolve as implementation begins. My office will send out periodic communications keeping you aware of timelines.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions you have regarding the implementation of the Broadband initiative.

Best—

Gregory Dill

Washtenaw County Administrator

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