



Press Release:

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Franklin County Receives Additional \$2.3 Million in Broadband Funding

FRANKLIN COUNTY, Virginia- On January 22nd, Governor Ralph Northam announced more than \$18.3 million in grants through the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) to support 12 projects across Virginia. These projects leverage over \$35 million in local and private matching funds and will connect approximately 36,000 households, including thousands of businesses and community anchor institutions. The VATI program provides targeted funding to extend service to areas that are presently unserved by any broadband provider.

Franklin County was awarded \$2,383,039 to continue development of a hybrid solution that the County believes will work to expand broadband coverage to remote areas as identified in the County's Broadband Plan adopted by the Franklin County Broadband Authority in August 2019. While much of the County is covered by high speed internet, several rural areas remain unserved. The hybrid solution calls for deploying fixed wireless in phases on existing structures where possible and building new structures where needed to reach the more rural and remote communities of Franklin County. The Broadband Plan also outlines a phased approach to installing fiber to the homes in the County's designated growth areas and villages. These areas are expected to have higher residential density and more commercial activity making these areas more practical and cost effective to serve with fiber.

In 2019, the County initiated a Request for Proposals (RFP) process, to work with private providers to help address the broadband issue in the County. Through that process

Franklin County developed a relationship with three private providers; Blue Ridge Towers and BRISNET, Point Broadband and Shentel to develop broadband solutions that can meet the County's objectives. The County then prepared a VATI application to help fund the projects identified by BRISNET and Shentel.

The awarded 2020 VATI Program funding from the state will be used by the County begin a collaborative effort to satisfy Phase 1 of the County's Broadband Plan. This collaborative effort will involve BRISNET and Shentel as private partners in providing fixed wireless internet as well as fiber to the home service in some areas.

"The County is pleased to have received over \$2.3 million of state funding through the VATI Program to assist Franklin County in addressing the broadband issue. "Broadband is extremely important to the residents and businesses in Franklin County and the County will continue to look for ways to leverage State and Federal resources to help get this valuable service to all citizens of Franklin County." , said Board of Supervisors' Chairman, Leland Mitchell.

BRISNET is proposing to provide fixed wireless broadband service to some of the communities most in need. These areas include Burnt Chimney, Scruggs, and Westlake in the northeast; Glade Hill, Snow Creek, Sontag, and Tom's Knob in the southeast; Callaway and Boones Mill in the northwest; and Fork Mountain and Henry in the southwestern portion of the County. This initial funding for the fixed wireless system in Phase 1 is expected to will allow for service to a significant amount of homes, businesses, and other critical sites in Franklin County. This service is expected to provide 50 to 100 mbs internet speeds to customers in these communities. This construction and implementation of this project is anticipated to take 18 months from the date all agreements are in place.

"It has been our privilege to work alongside Franklin County for the last two years as a Broadband resource, Now it will be our honor to work with them as their Partner on this very important project to bring Broadband to Franklin County" says Anthony Smith, Managing Partner of BRISNET.

Shentel has also prepared a solution to provide new fiber connections to the homes in areas designated in the County's Broadband Plan. Shentel proposes to add 6.5 miles of new fiber in the Union Hall Village area to serve an estimated 190 properties, homes and businesses along Old Salem School Road in the Penhook community, which is part of the County's Village Plan for this area. This fiber provides up to 1 Gbps service to residences and businesses in this growth area. The construction and implementation of this project is anticipated to take 12 -18 months from the date all agreements are in place.

The County began a broadband initiative in 2016 with the Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) who helped develop an initial needs assessment and conducted a survey of the citizens. With assistance from County staff and Franklin County Public Schools the County received over 6300 survey responses in 2016. Most respondents indicated that they had either limited broadband or no internet service at their homes which made it difficult for home businesses, education, telemedicine, and entertainment uses. In 2018, the County received a planning grant from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development (VA DHCD) to hire a consultant to complete the work begun by CIT and develop a broadband plan for Franklin County. The County contracted with Design Nine, Inc. and the plan was completed and adopted by the Franklin County Broadband Authority on August 20, 2019.

In 2019, the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission awarded Franklin County \$650,000 of grant funding to the Franklin County Broadband Authority (FCBA) to enhance broadband fiber in several areas of the Franklin County. That grant funding is providing last-mile fiber to homes in four (4) different areas in Franklin County. The FCBA has partnered with Shentel to install, maintain and operate the fiber extensions as generally described in the following areas:

The Ferrum/Waidsboro area fiber extension included the installation of 3.4 miles of fiber in Ferrum/Waidsboro community creating service for approximately 80 homes and one non-residential structure. This project has been completed by Shentel. A project in Windy Gap area includes the installation of approximately 4.5 miles of fiber in the Windy Gap/Cooper Cove area of the County creating service for approximately 114 homes. Engineering for this project has been completed and permits approved. Construction is expected to begin in February 2020. Another project in the Hardy area of the County along Wysong Mill and Walnut Run Roads includes the installation of approximately 5.3 miles of fiber creating service for approximately 120 homes and four non-residential structures. This project has been engineered and is awaiting permit approval. Construction is expected to begin in February or March 2020. A final Shentel project is planned along Route 122 in the Burnt Chimney community which will include the installation of nearly 12 miles of fiber along Route 122 from Hardy Road to Route 116. This service is expected to service approximately 106 homes and 39 non-residential structures. This project has been engineered and is awaiting permit approval. Construction is expected to begin in February or March 2020.

Chris Kyle, Vice President of Shentel, states “Shentel is excited to partner with Franklin County to continue extending an advanced telecommunications network offering gigabit broadband speeds to more communities in Franklin County. We appreciate the

leadership of the Franklin County government, and we look forward to extending broadband to the residents of Franklin County.”

The remaining projects funded in the Tobacco Commission grant include installation of 1.0 mile of fiber within the Summit View Business Park and installing approximately 3.5 miles of fiber conduit and fiber with the Western Virginia Water Authority (WVWA) waterline project on Grassy Hill Road. This new fiber along Grassy Hill Road is expected to create service for approximately 194 homes and 15 non-residential structures. Construction of both of these projects are underway.

Inquiries regarding service availability with BRISCNET or Shentel can be made by visiting BRISCNET’s website at www.brisnet.com or Shentel at www.shentel.com .