



PRESS RELEASE

FRANKLIN COUNTY BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES TO MOVE FORWARD

For Immediate Release: April 1, 2020

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Rocky Mount, Virginia – The Franklin County Broadband Authority and the Franklin County Board of Supervisors moves forward with Phase One of delivering broadband to its citizens utilizing grant funds awarded in January from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). In January of this year, Governor Northam announced a broadband grant award of over \$2.3 million for the Franklin County Broadband Authority. Application for funding was based on a multi-phased hybrid approach developed for Franklin County as part of its Broadband Plan adopted in August 2019. This approved Plan called for fiber to the home to be built out in Village areas and other designated growth areas where it makes financial sense. In addition, it called for providing fixed wireless in more remote, harder to reach areas of the County.

The grant was awarded to Franklin County in partnership with Blue Ridge Towers and Shentel. The fixed wireless portion of the project is being developed by Blue Ridge Towers and its wireless subsidiary, BriscNet. The initial phase of the fixed wireless project will require the construction of seven (7) new towers (Snow Creek, Ferrum, Westlake, Wirtz, Callaway, Sontag, Glade Hill), replacement of two others (Fork Mountain, Henry), while utilizing four (4) other existing structures in the County. A fiber to the home portion of the grant project is being developed by Shentel along Old Salem School Road in the Union Hall area of the County. Overall this project anticipates making broadband available to over 20,000 households and businesses. The State of Virginia has authorized the County and its partners to proceed with the necessary due diligence work while the contracts are being finalized. This due diligence work includes the start of site acquisitions, environmental and historic reviews, cultural and geotechnical studies as well as preliminary engineering for sites in Snow Creek, Sontag, Fork Mountain, Henry, Callaway, Westlake and Wirtz as well as other sites. Shentel anticipates completing all the final engineering, permitting and other preliminary work on the Old Salem School project to occur immediately as well.

Steven Sandy, the Franklin County Director of Planning & Community Development stated, “Some of these reviews and engineering studies take 60 to 90 days to complete. The pre-authorization from the State allows the County and its partners to move forward on these necessary items to get this project going while the final contract negotiations and approvals are taking place. As soon as all contracts are completed with private partners and the State of Virginia, construction and equipment installation can begin. We expect that to happen this summer. The County is looking to implement the construction in phases to get customers connected to the network as soon as possible and not waiting until the entire project is completed in 2021.”

The County expects the entire fixed wireless project to be completed by the end of summer 2021. To determine if your home or business might receive service from this new fixed wireless network contact BriscNet at 540.566.4588 or at www.brisnet.com. For more information on the County’s Broadband Plan or recently

approved VATI application go to the Broadband Authority page on the Franklin County website at <https://www.franklincountyva.gov/546/Broadband-Authority>.

The Franklin County Broadband Authority, in partnership with Shentel, began its broadband deployment last year utilizing a \$650,000 Tobacco Commission grant to provide fiber to the home service to over 460 households and businesses. This initial phase of the County’s broadband deployment involved extending fiber in six (6) different areas of the County. These areas include Waidsboro, Wirtz, Windy Gap, Walnut Run (Hardy), Burnt Chimney and Grassy Hill Road areas.

“The County continues to work to expand broadband offerings in Franklin County utilizing different technologies while also maximizing the use of county facilities and resources and our use of grant funding resources. The County is pleased to have a continued partnership with the State of Virginia, Shentel and Blue Ridge Towers – BriscNet to help provide this vital infrastructure to our citizens,” says Leland Mitchell, Chairman of the Franklin County Board of Supervisors & Broadband Authority.

The County is currently working on Phase Two plans for additional grant applications that will look to provide more fixed wireless broadband coverage in other underserved areas of the County such as Endicott, Ferrum and Penhook as well as increasing the amount of fiber to the home in village areas. Additional rounds of grant funding will also be utilized to provide more community poles to provide service to areas that prove difficult to reach due to topographic areas.

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