

CAROLINE COUNTY PRESS RELEASE



*For immediate release
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County Administrator*

FY 2022 VIRGINIA TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE (VATI) GRANT APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED TO VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*If Successful, Grants Will Dramatically Expand Access to Broadband Service in
Caroline County*

The Caroline County Board of Supervisors has authorized the submittal of Fiscal Year 2022 Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant applications to the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development (“DHCD”) to expand broadband service to unserved areas of the County in partnership with the internet service providers Comcast and Atlantic Broadband (ABB). DHCD is expected to have up to \$700,000,000 available in VATI grants to award in FY 2022 due to a massive infusion of federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocated by the General Assembly and Governor Ralph Northam. Both grant applications were submitted to DHCD by the deadline of September 14, 2021.

The VATI grant applications are the result of a broadband strategic plan developed and presented to the Board of Supervisors on September 7, 2021 by Chairman Jason Barlow and Vice-Chairman Jason Jacobus of the Caroline Broadband Advisory Committee. The advisory committee was appointed by the Board of Supervisors and consists of six County citizens with expertise in the fields of technology and communications. Supervisors Floyd Thomas and Jeff Sili serve as Board of Supervisors representatives to the committee with staff support provided by Director of Information Technology David Sadler. The committee was charged with developing a plan for universal broadband coverage in Caroline County. Universal coverage is achieved when all County citizens have access to high-speed, reliable internet service.

If the VATI grant is approved, Comcast will be able to offer broadband service to approximately 360 additional homes along Jericho Road, Anderson Mill Road and the nearby vicinity. The Atlantic Broadband VATI application consists of three (3) phases. If VATI funding is secured, ABB will ultimately offer service to 1,738 additional homes in and around the Dawn/Ruther Glen area, 1,197 additional homes in Woodford and along Route 17 and surrounding areas and

931 additional homes in the Sparta, Central Point and Passing areas south of Fort A.P. Hill to Route 600. All told, a successful grant application will allow Atlantic Broadband to offer broadband service to 3,866 currently unserved homes. This would enable 100% of the homes located east of Interstate 95 in Caroline County to have access to broadband service.

County staff and the broadband advisory committee are in discussions with Comcast about a possible second phase VATI grant application in FY 2023 that would add 390 more home passings in unserved areas west of I-95. If this application comes to fruition in FY 2023 and a VATI grant is ultimately awarded, 100% of the homes west of I-95 will have access to broadband. Combined with the 100% coverage east of I-95 through Atlantic Broadband, this will enable Caroline to achieve 100% coverage of the entire County if all VATI grant applications are successful.

Grant awards are typically announced by DHCD in December or January. None of the projects described above will be possible without the award of VATI grant funds. If the grants are awarded, Comcast and Atlantic Broadband will be expected to complete all VATI funded phases of the projects within 24 months (allowing 6 months for contract execution). DHCD will consider longer project timelines for larger project areas if applicants can sufficiently detail the reasoning for an extended timeline in their application. Atlantic Broadband will have up to three (3) years to complete the federally funded Rural Development Opportunity Fund (RDOF) portion of its project in the Sparta, Central Point and Passing areas south of Fort A. P. Hill to Route 600.

Caroline County has committed to provide a total of \$3,955,200 in local matching funds for the FY 2022 Comcast and Atlantic Broadband VATI grant applications. The County will aggressively pursue all federal and state broadband grant opportunities to fund its share of matching funds for the VATI grant. However, the current designated source of the required \$3,955,200 local match is a portion of the County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The County has been allocated a total of \$5,967,971 in ARPA funds to date. Half of the funds (\$2,983,985) are currently in hand, with the remaining half expected in May or June 2022.

The County is seeking approximately \$22,921,083.62 in VATI grant funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Atlantic Broadband has agreed to contribute \$1,200 for each home passed, matching the County's per home passing commitment and will utilize Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) funds for a portion of the project. RDOF is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program designed to close the digital divide in the United States by investing billions of dollars in the construction of rural broadband networks. Comcast has pledged to contribute \$1,322.96 per home passing for the FY 2022 VATI grant application.

“The success of the FY 2022 VATI grant applications is critical to achieving Caroline County's mission of providing access to broadband to all of our citizens” said Board of Supervisors Chairman Reginald L. Underwood, who represents the Reedy Church District. “Without these grant funds Caroline County cannot afford to provide this desperately needed service. We all know that high speed internet in every household is now an absolute necessity. It enables access to educational opportunities through distance learning, promotes access to health care and

telemedicine and encourages and sustains new and existing home-based and small businesses by enabling them to compete globally.”

“The Board of Supervisors wishes to commend and express its deep appreciation to the Caroline Broadband Advisory Committee and IT Director David Sadler for the tremendous amount of time, effort and great work that went into pulling all the necessary components together to prepare and submit the FY 2022 VATI grant applications”, said Chairman Underwood. “We also wish to thank and acknowledge Atlantic Broadband and Comcast for their willingness to commit the financial resources and due diligence needed to submit these grant applications. With \$700,000,000 in funding on the table, we are hopeful that our applications will be successful and Caroline County can take a huge step forward toward providing universal broadband access to our citizens.”

Specific information on the service areas of the projects will be released on the Caroline County website at www.co.caroline.va.us soon.

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