

BROADBAND INITIATIVE

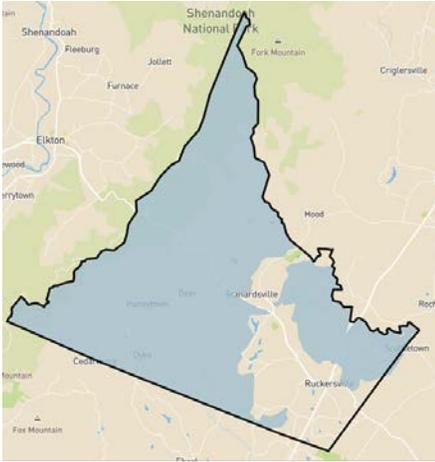
The mission of the Greene County Broadband Initiative is to study, recommend, and support broadband development initiatives with the goal of bringing broadband access to all residents, students, businesses, and visitors in Greene County in the most cost-effective, equitable, minimum risk, high quality, and expedient manner possible.

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Beginning in March of 2017, the Greene County Board of Supervisors identified the expansion of quality broadband access and service throughout the County as a high priority in the County's overall strategic plan. In response, the County Administrator instituted the County Administrator's Broadband Initiative Advisory Committee to serve as an advisory body to the County Administrator on broadband development initiatives. The Broadband Initiative Advisory Committee has explored existing infrastructure and continues to study options and solutions on behalf of the Greene County citizens for internet accessibility and services in the most cost-effective manner. The Broadband Initiative Advisory Committee has developed and provided the Recommendations of the Committee for authorization by the Greene County Board of Supervisors on January 8, 2019.

Greene County is aware of the need for broadband access crosses many different paths in Greene County. Whether it be education, public safety, medical services, agriculture, business, tourism, or local government, to name a few, all of these sectors of our community must rely on a seamless, robust communications network to provide their valuable services. Expanded broadband service provides significant opportunity to county residents. Students need broadband to access the internet to do homework and apply to colleges. Working families need it to apply to jobs and to access various government services, and seniors are increasingly reliant on broadband accessibility to connect to the growing world of telehealth. Additionally, there has been significant growth in the number of home-based businesses. Broadband connections mean instant access to online information, email, instant messaging and other communications services available over the Internet. For businesses, it means communicating more quickly and reliably with customers and suppliers. For all citizens, it means that information can move into and out of our homes and businesses more efficiently than it does today. Reliable broadband has become one of the most sought after features for home purchasers. Providing every home with equal access promotes equity and opportunity for all citizens and business.

A study done in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development finds a strong correlation between household income and in-home connectivity—a pattern that persists across both rural and economically depressed urban communities. The study finds that while an overall two-thirds of U.S. adults aged 18 and older had access to broadband internet in their homes, just 41 percent of adults with household incomes less than \$20,000 had it, while 90 percent of adults with household income higher than \$100,000 had access. In Greene County, the areas that are currently unserved have median incomes that are as much as 50% lower than the county average median income.



The map in figure 1 shows the areas (in blue) that will receive high speed broadband over the next 3 years as part of the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) grant. The Greene County Board of supervisors has committed \$2.6 million dollars to support the broadband expansion into the unserved areas. The Rise grant is a collaboration between Greene County, Central Virginia Electrical Cooperative, Firefly, Dominion Power and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative to provide high speed broadband to 2687 unserved units and over 471 new miles of fiber. This covers all of the areas in Greene County that are currently unserved by a provider. In total the Rise grant is a \$27 million dollar project.

Figure 1

GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES: BROADBAND

- **Develop a broadband implementation plan with specific attention to the County’s anchor institutions such as schools, medical facilities, judicial and law enforcement agencies, and all government buildings.**
- **In collaboration with Emergency Services Communication upgrades, utilize new and/or existing towers and fiber infrastructure to make improvements as appropriate.**
- **Encourage Internet Service Providers (ISP) to invest in providing all residents/businesses with at least 100 megabits of reliable, high-speed broadband access.**
 - Continue meetings with ISP to discuss planned improvements and discuss potential public/private collaboration opportunities
 - Support the implementation and installation of the RISE grant.
- **Review and update as needed the tower regulations in the Greene County Zoning Ordinance to allow a more streamlined process for situating towers while protecting the aesthetic view sheds.**
 - Examine other localities’ ordinances
 - Consult with Tourism Council to assure no negative impact on tourism

- **Explore with and assist developers with plans to provide broadband infrastructure in all new residential and business developments.**

- Formally add to site plan review: review of broadband considerations
- Formally add to pre-app meeting agenda: discuss broadband considerations

Explore Broadband Funding Opportunities:

- Pursue grant and partnership opportunities to support broadband development initiatives
- Seek grants and partnership initiatives to Encourage affordable access to broadband for all citizens.
- Community Development Block Grant Planning Grant
- Virginia Telecommunication Initiative
- The Vibrant Community Initiative (VCI)
- e-Rate Funding for Schools & Libraries
- USDA Community Connect Grant Program

Prior to grant applications, consider a fiscal agent structure:

- Broadband Authority: BOS, Regional, stand-alone, EDA
- Other: TJPDC, collaboration with other localities