



Albemarle
Broadband
Authority

Broadband Status Report

4th Quarter CY2022

December 21, 2022

The Albemarle Broadband Authority (ABBA) reviewed and is submitting the Broadband Status Report for the third quarter of calendar year 2022 (October 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022). The report is provided to the County of Albemarle, VA Board of Supervisors as information. This report provides summary level information on all activities completed and underway by ABBA. Here is this quarter's *From the Chair*:

Work with Brightspeed, formerly CenturyLink, on VATI 2021 continues to bring challenges but is proceeding. The Department of Housing and Community Development approved our corrective action plan to address the problems. This continues to be a focus for our efforts in the near term. The Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (BAAO) is necessarily spending a lot more time on this project as a result, tracking its progress. The project timeline has been extended through March of 2023, but already that date is in doubt as we monitor progress.

The VATI 2022 project to complete broadband rollout to the county over 3 years is off to a predictably slow start, as the various players (Firefly, Dominion, Appalachian Power, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative) have been planning and executing a wide range of project and regulatory startup activities that do not translate into any new connection made yet.

This year ABBA was not involved in any grant proposal with the VATI system, instead that torch was carried by the BAAO. This is a foreshadowing of how broadband in Albemarle will come to be managed in the future, with the role of ABBA sunseting as the role of the BAAO rises. This transition will take some time, and there may be situations encountered along the way where the structure of ABBA, as an entity constituted under the Wireless Service Authorities act, offers flexibility or



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opportunity not readily available to the County government. If such situations arise we will want to put ABBA to its best use to address them.

Bucky Walsh
ABBA Chair

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2023 Update

Our office continues to await award decisions by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development regarding the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission's VATI 2023 application, to which Albemarle County is a party. Unlike the last several VATI projects, this project is being pursued by the Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (BAAO) rather than ABBA.

This project, in partnership with Firefly, will address areas adjacent to the VATI 22 project areas that were not included in that award because earlier eligibility criteria precluded areas that received greater than 25/3 Mbps. Receiving this award will ensure that these residents will receive service concurrently with VATI 2022 households rather than consecutively.

The Albemarle portion of the broader application requests \$3.7 million of funding from DHCD on a total budget of \$8.8 million, and a local match not to exceed \$440,000. The total application asks for \$13 million to expand broadband access in 4 other counties.

Though DHCD expects to complete internal deliberations by the end of December, announcements may not occur until the first quarter of 2023.

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2022 Update

Firefly continues make-ready work in Albemarle County in preparation for construction operations to begin in early-2023. During the second quarterly call for VATI 2022 stakeholders, Firefly staff demonstrated new features of the Firefly project website (<http://fireflyva.com/rise>) which include a tracker for project area progress. The Appalachian Power and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative served areas of the County are broken down by project area. For residents in a Dominion Service area, the project areas have not yet been delineated and no schedule is available.



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On that same call, Dominion Energy's representative shared that while a schedule for completion of its middle mile program in Albemarle County is not yet available, the work is underway. Firefly has advised that they will provide estimated completion for project areas expected to be completed within a rolling six-month period.

BAAO will continue to monitor the progress of this project and will provide guidance to residents interested in this project on how to register with Firefly to receive updates.

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2021 Update

Following the transfer of assets from CenturyLink to Brightspeed, this project continues with the new leadership. The requested extension for this project was approved by DHCD; construction operations must be completed by March 31, 2023. Working with the BAAO and coordinating with DHCD, Brightspeed prepared a Corrective Action Plan in response to the Letter of Finding received on September 26, 2022.

The details of that Corrective Action Plan were shared with the Authority at the ABBA regular meeting on October 26, 2022. The enclosed slides from that ABBA meeting detail the Corrective Action Plan (Appendix B). In summary, the plan replaces an initial site visit with an installation that seeks to place a temporary surface line and activate service, and subsequently bury the surface line. Further, Brightspeed commits to providing technicians and residents a plain language explanation of all the installation process and delineating all actions residents can take in the event that any aspect of this project is unsatisfactory.

Implementation of the corrective action plan has had some challenges associated with consistency in communications by Brightspeed representatives, and the need to increase line burial staffing in order to meet existing and future demand. BAAO continues to meet weekly with Brightspeed representatives to discuss progress.

Construction operations have completed in much of the Taylor's Gap project area, with two tranches currently receiving service. Construction has



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been throughout the Stony Point project area. Construction is expected to begin soon in the Campbell/Cobham project areas, in order to meet the March 31, 2023 deadline.

As these latter project areas are some of the largest, the importance of BAAO communications with residents is high. BAAO continues to host webinars for residents interested in this program, recordings of which are posted to the project page on the BAAO website.

ABBA Public Meetings

The public had in-person and real time audio-visual access to the October and December ABBA public meeting at the County Office Building and over Zoom and real time audio access over telephone. In lieu of rescheduling the November and December meetings, which both fell on holiday weeks, the November meeting was cancelled and the December meeting was held on December 6, 2022.

ABBA welcomed public comment at its meetings and invited and still invites the public to send questions, comments, and suggestions through email at broadband@albemarle.org. All public meetings held this quarter were recorded and are available for viewing through links on the County's website.

Among the topics discussed by the Authority during its meetings, but not otherwise covered in this document:

- The 2022 ABBA Strategic Plan was updated by the membership and approved.
- A discussion regarding the decrease in out of service complaints from residents following the completion of a rehabilitation program CenturyLink committed earlier this year.
- The ABBA Financial Report (Appendix A) was recommended to be included as part of a consent agenda moving forward.



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BAAO Updates

The BAAO continues to serve as administrators of ABBA, while also developing and engaging programs to meet the County's digital inclusion goals. In the prior quarter, BAAO helped transition residents impacted by the shutdown of a fixed wireless provider, successfully launched a new affordability initiative, and began coalition building with community partners to develop a digital equity plan and to begin working collaboratively to address digital inclusion issues across our community.

As reported in the 3Q Broadband Status Report, in September, representatives from Shentel reached out to BAAO to discuss the shutdown of its BEAM fixed wireless service. Provision of that service in the County was supported by CARES Act funding and in coordination with Albemarle County Public Schools and served nearly 300 Albemarle County residents during its nearly two years of service.

The shutdown was required as Shentel prepares to transfer assets associated with the BEAM service to a national competitor, as it shifts its attention from fixed wireless service to fiber-to-the-home solutions. Representatives from Shentel worked closely with BAAO and DHCD to assist with transitioning impacted residents.

BAAO was able to use information provided by Brightspeed to identify alternative providers for those residents and to alert those providers of the need to service those residents. Additionally, Shentel was able to work with T-Mobile to provide an alternative fixed wireless service trial for impacted residents.

BAAO identified that half of the impacted customers were within the current footprint of an internet service provider able to provide speeds more than 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload. Of the remaining residents, some were within the footprint of the ongoing VATI 2021 project, while the rest fell within the VATI 2022/3 project. BAAO has alerted both providers involved in those projects.

The shutdown occurred on November 30th 2022, and BAAO continues to support residents who have not yet found an alternative service.



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Announced by press release on December 7, 2022, the County's ACP Bridge program has launched, and its first provider partner is Comcast/Xfinity. The program lowers the affordability barriers for broadband service by raising the federal Affordable Connectivity Program's (ACP) benefit from up to \$30 per month, to up to \$50 per month. The additional supplement is funded through general fund appropriations made by the Board of Supervisors to support BAAO programs during the FY21 and FY22 budgets.

Residents already enrolled in ACP and receiving service from Comcast, should have already been contacted by Comcast representatives about this opportunity. Throughout this partnership, hundreds of low-income Albemarle County households will see a decrease in the monthly burden of broadband service.

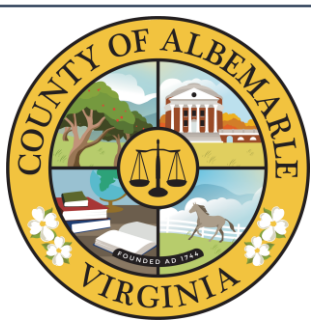
BAAO continues to solicit additional provider partners and urges all residents struggling with broadband costs to learn more about ACP at: <http://getinternet.gov>.

To more broadly address issues related to digital inclusion, BAAO has begun work to develop a coalition of community partners and stakeholders to develop a Regional Digital Equity Plan. Community partners met twice during the last quarter to discuss digital equity in our community. Engagement opportunities are planned for the Spring in partnership with a cohort of students from the University of Virginia's School of Architecture's Master of Urban and Environmental Planning. The students will engage in focus groups with target populations and work with broadband speed test and sentiment surveillance data. Additionally, asset mapping exercises will provide a basis for further planning efforts.

This coalition will also be working to advance digital equity alongside planning efforts. BAAO is currently working to prepare a grant application for the Federal Communication Commission's ACP Outreach grants, which aim to support efforts to boost ACP enrollment. Guidance from DHCD's Broadband Office suggests our region may have approximately 20,000 eligible households, compared with just 3,000 ACP beneficiaries.

Plans for Next Quarter

BAAO will continue to monitor and the progress for the VATI 2021 and VATI 2022 programs, and hopefully work to advance the VATI 2023



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project to contract. BAAO will also continue its work as public liaison for all publicly funded broadband expansion projects. Monthly reports to DHCD and ABBA on all of these projects will continue until completion of the projects.

ABBA and BAAO will also continue to report to DHCD regarding the Corrective Action Plan for the VATI 2021 project. State and County funding for this project will continue to be withheld until the project is in compliance per DHCD.

BAAO will also be awaiting award announcements from the FCC regarding the ACP Outreach grants and continue to advanced the planning efforts associated with the regional partnership. Ahead of award announcements, BAAO will prepare procurement materials so that grant-funded services can be solicited as soon as funds are available.



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Appendix A – ABBA Summary Budget Report

					Update: 11/29/2022
4-4300-91097-491097-950030-9999 (EXPENSE CODE) + ARPA 5301 Fund					
BROADBAND INCENTIVES>ALBEMARLE BROADBAND AUTHORITY + ARPA Funding					
	Fund Balance	Commitment/ Projected Expenses	Paid Expenses	Remaining Project Funds	
Current FY23 Balance (includes \$4.5mil in ARPA Appropriation, \$4.37mil of that for VATI 2022)	\$5,461,300.00				
VATI 2020 Project at 8 locations Commitment (PO 2021-7747 CenturyLink)		\$291,300.00	\$291,300.00	\$0.00	
Administrative Fee for DHCD VATI 2020 Award 1% of \$291,300		\$2,913.00	\$2,913.00	\$0.00	
Administrative Fee for DHCD VATI 2021 Award 1% of \$2,276,110		\$22,761.10	\$22,761.10	\$0.00	
Administrative Fee for ARPA Appropriation 1% of \$4,500,000		\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00	\$0.00	
VATI 2021 Project Commitment Brightspeed: Payment on Hold		\$640,000.00	\$0.00		
VATI 2022 Project Commitment TJPD/Firefly: Awaiting request for first payment		\$4,368,000.00	\$0.00		
	\$91,325.90	\$5,369,974.10	\$361,974.10	\$91,325.90	



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Appendix B – VATI 2021 Corrective Action Plan Slides

The Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) and Brightspeed



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VATI 2021: Albemarle County

October 26, 2022

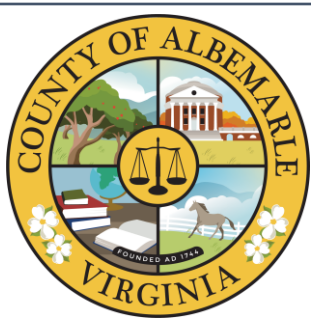
Presented by:

Rich Schollmann
Steve Brewer
Heather Lee
Deloris Carroll
Nancy DeVinay



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Corrective Action Plan

Main Issues Identified in Sept. DHCD Letter of Findings

1. Communication Issues
2. Installations without regard to Homeowner's Property

Requested Actions

1. Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to address Communication Gaps
2. List of effected Customers and Corrective Actions
3. Outline Process Improvements



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Order and Installation Process



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