

Albemarle  
Broadband  
Authority

# Broadband Status Report

## 2nd Quarter CY2023

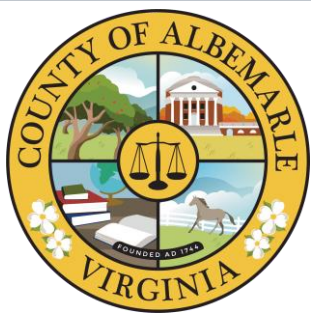
July 18th, 2023

The Albemarle Broadband Authority (ABBA) reviewed and is submitting the Broadband Status Report for the second quarter of calendar year 2023 (April 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023). 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 and the Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (BAAO). Here is this quarter's *From the Chair*:

*On the good news front, the Federal BEAD funding (Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment) for Virginia was announced last quarter in the amount of \$1.48B. These funds will be administered through DHCD just as the VATI funds have been administered which have proven so useful to us in the past. There will, of course, be additional rules applicable to using federal funds, but on the whole, this is an enormous positive for ensuring broadband availability throughout the state.*

*On the not-so-good news front, the BAAO's application for additional funding to support the RISE project from the VATI 2023 program was not awarded funds. The timing on this project is not urgent, and we can reapply in future years for funds. While a negative, this is not likely to have a significant impact on the rollout.*

*The excitement about the Firefly RISE project means that everyone in the county who sees an underground cable surveying or marking truck or sees a Firefly truck in their vicinity immediately wants to know if this means their fiber is about to be installed. Albemarle is one to two years away from serious deployments from that project. Some of the make-ready work is being done now, and some of the Firefly connections to CVEC customers are still happening, but the fruits of the RISE project will be a while yet in coming. The scope of the project, and Firefly's*



Albemarle  
Broadband  
Authority

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*dependency on Dominion to get their wiring done first offers no real chance to accelerate this project as we all would like.*

*Bucky Walsh  
ABBA Chair*

### Virginia Telecommunication Initiative 2023 Update

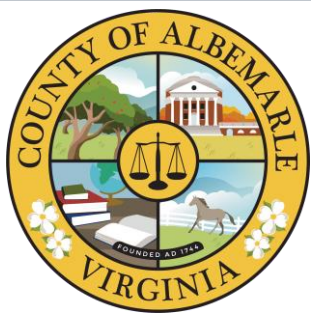
The Department of Housing and Community Development announced awards for its Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) 2023 round, and the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission's (TJPDC) application was not among the awarded grants. BAAO will continue to pursue these areas for inclusion and will share details at a later ABBA meeting.

The proposal would have extended service to approximately 1,500 locations in Albemarle County that had previously been excluded from VATI proposals because they were served at speeds exceeding 25/3 Mbps. Within the County, the proposal would have largely filled in areas left out of the Firefly VATI 22 project, and would have ensured that residents within the proposed project areas would receive service concurrently with VATI 2022 households rather than consecutively.

In light of deadlines associated with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Recover Fund dollars, BAAO is concerned that holding those funds for a subsequent VATI round might put that funding at risk, should there be a delay in obligating and dispensing those funds by 2024 and 2026, respectively. As such, the Office is considering options for utilizing the remaining \$2M ARPA funding towards a partnership with Firefly to connect the impacted homes.

### Virginia Telecommunication Initiative 2022 Update

Make-ready and construction operations continue in the VATI 22 project in partnership with Firefly Fiber Broadband. This project represents a partnership between Albemarle's four power providers to leverage utility infrastructure to deploy a fiber network that spans 13 counties.



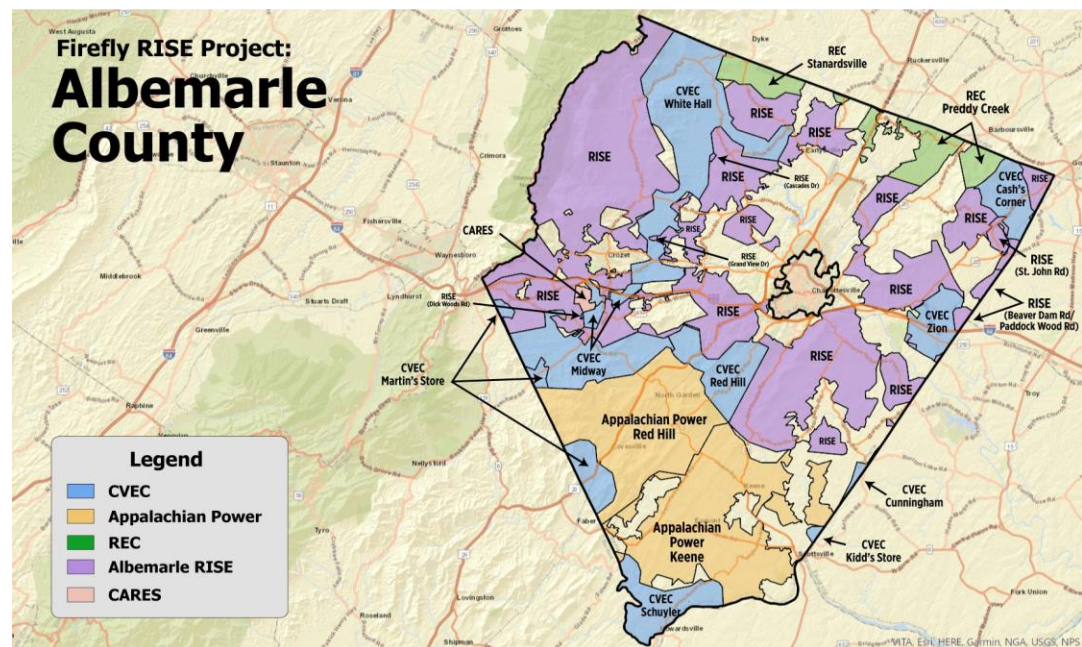
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## 2nd Quarter CY2023

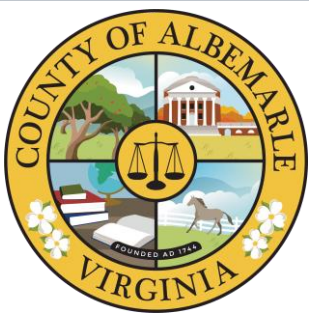
Connections in Albemarle County are expected to begin by year-end, with the first connections occurring in areas served by Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and Appalachian Power.

Connections in the Dominion Energy portion of the build will benefit from the Dominion Middle Mile program. As Dominion is handling its own construction, timelines depend on Dominion's progress. A schedule for completion is expected by year-end, however, construction operations have been ongoing throughout the quarter in various locations throughout the County.



A quarterly call for VATI 2022 stakeholders was held on June 15<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. During the meeting, TJPDC updated stakeholders on the project progress. TJPDC noted a site visit to Firefly headquarters to get an overview of the project management and construction operations, along with several other site visits in other participating counties.

On that same call, Dominion Energy's representative shared that fiber design is nearly complete throughout the Albemarle build, and 16 miles of construction has already been completed.



Albemarle  
Broadband  
Authority

# Broadband Status Report

## 2nd Quarter CY2023

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

While construction on the VATI 2021 project, in partnership with Brightspeed, had purportedly been completed by the March 31<sup>st</sup> deadline, numerous areas have received additional construction activities in the months since.

An additional tracking file has been prepared to monitor progress on resolving issues associated with this project on a per installation basis. Many of the tracked issues are the result of a failure on the part of the contractor to properly splice fiber at network facilities. This results in a delay of installation that occasionally results in cancellation of orders without notification to the customer, prolonging the delay as they must then discover the cancellation and reinitiate the installation process.

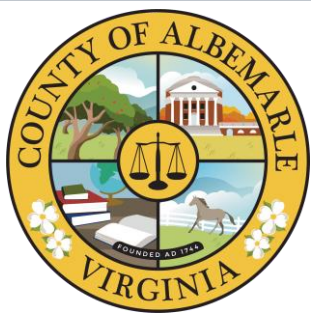
Additional issues have been caused by a failure to build to all of the addresses expected as part of this project. At present, Brightspeed does not intend to complete the project as proposed.

The Office has asked DHCD to make a determination on how to proceed. Based on available data, approximately 200 locations that should have been included have not been built, with 90 of those lacking alternatives.

Further, as of submission of this report, Brightspeed has failed to submit the necessary financial documents to initiate the close out procedure. Having failed to request an extension, the project is currently out of compliance with DHCD.

Customers that have received service through this project have reported satisfaction with the service and have largely taken advantage of the discounted pricing BAAO was able to extract from Brightspeed following its sudden price increase.





## Albemarle Broadband Authority

# Broadband Status Report

## 2nd Quarter CY2023

### ABBA Public Meetings

The public had in-person and real time audio-visual access to the April and May ABBA regular meetings at the County Office Building and over Zoom and real time audio access over telephone. With no action items on the agenda, the June meeting was cancelled.

ABBA welcomed public comment at its meetings and invites the public to send questions, comments, and suggestions through email at [broadband@albemarle.org](mailto: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:

- Updates regarding DHCD's plans for Digital Equity Act and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment funds
- A report out from Mike Culp on an industry conference he attended.

### BAAO Updates

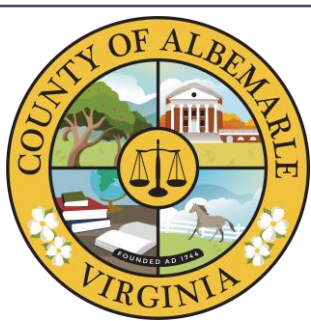
The BAAO continues to serve as administrators of ABBA, while also developing and engaging programs to meet the County's digital inclusion goals.

During this quarter, the BAAO continued its work to develop a digital equity plan for the region in partnership with a coalition of stakeholders including local organizations and leaders from the City of Charlottesville, University of Virginia and the Piedmont Virginia Community College.

Initial engagement work was completed through the coalition's partnership with a cohort of Masters of Urban and Environmental Planning students. These efforts identified three major barriers to digital access: device access, fear, and digital skills deficits.

Engagement efforts will continue through the summer, along with discussions with stakeholders about potential interventions. Completion of the report is expected in the Fall.

The Office has also continued preparations for implementation of its FCC ACP Outreach Grant. The grant will fund the hiring of two to three



## Albemarle Broadband Authority

# Broadband Status Report

## 2nd Quarter CY2023

digital navigators and a marketing outreach effort to increase enrollment in the Affordable Connectivity Program.

The Office also continued preparations for the VATI 2024 and BEAD processes by evaluating FCC and administrative data regarding planned or existing broadband access. While the funding amounts for the next VATI round are uncertain, the Commonwealth's initial BEAD funding is now announced as \$1

### Appendix A – ABBA Summary Budget Report

				Update: 07/19/2023
<b>4-4300-91097-491097-950030-9999 (EXPENSE CODE) + ARPA 5301 Fund</b>				
<b>BROADBAND INCENTIVES&gt;ALBEMARLE BROADBAND AUTHORITY + ARPA Funding</b>				
	<b>Fund Balance</b>	<b>Commitment/ Projected Expenses</b>	<b>Paid Expenses</b>	<b>Remaining Project Funds</b>
Current FY23 Balance (includes \$4.5mil in ARPA Appropriation, \$4.37mil of that for VATI 2022)	\$5,099,325.90			
VATI 2021 Project Commitment Brightspeed: Payment on Hold		\$640,000.00	\$0.00	
VATI 2022 Project Commitment TJPDC/Firefly: First payment for \$121,863.50 PAID. Second payment for \$23,187.19 PAID.		\$4,368,000.00	\$145,050.69	
	<b>\$91,325.90</b>	<b>\$5,008,000.00</b>	<b>\$145,050.69</b>	<b>\$91,325.90</b>
<i>Note: Remaining Project Funds unless noted otherwise are subject to ARPA Guidelines and Rules.</i>				