

Albemarle
Broadband
Authority

Broadband Status Report

4th Quarter CY2021

January 24, 2022

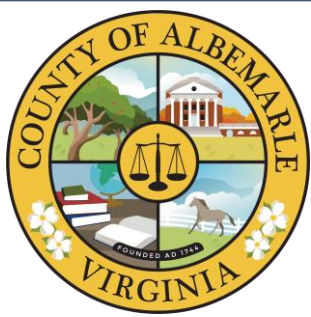
The Albemarle Broadband Authority (ABBA) reviewed and is submitting the Broadband Status Report for fourth quarter calendar year 2021 (October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021). The report is provided to the County of Albemarle, VA Board of Supervisors as information. This report provides summary level information on all activities completed and underway by ABBA. Here is this quarter's *From the Chair*:

The award from DHCD to the TJPDC for VATI 2022 is fantastic news for Albemarle County. This represents more than 5000 additional locations in our County which will have fiber internet with speeds up to 1Gbps symmetric made available to them over the next 3 years. Of particular note is that this will complete the efforts to make internet services available to everyone in Albemarle County.

This will not, sadly, mark the end of the need for ABBA. The last two years have demonstrated that even those of us in rural locations need broadband for school, work, and general living. Many of those in the County who have Internet do not have enough capacity to meet all of their needs. The old standard of 25/3 Mbps (down/up) no longer suffices when Mom and/or Dad and one or more children all need simultaneous access for work and school. The Federal government has already begun to move to a more realistic standard for broadband of 100/100 Mbps as the minimum. We anticipate significant funding will be available in the next few years from the Federal government and dispensed by the State and locally using this standard as the floor.

To that end we are identifying those locations in Albemarle which will not measure up to the new standards, or which have such poor service or reliability levels as to make their service unacceptable. We will be prepared to take advantage of these funding opportunities to ensure that all of Albemarle has broadband available to it, now and in the future.

Bucky Walsh
ABBA Chair



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Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2022 Update

We are pleased to inform the Board of the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) decision to award Firefly Fiber Broadband, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC), the Albemarle Broadband Authority, and 12 other partner municipalities with a \$79M VATI grant. As previously reported, this project would include 36,283 passes, with over 5,300 in Albemarle County, and help achieve universal broadband access in this, and 12 other counties, by 2025.

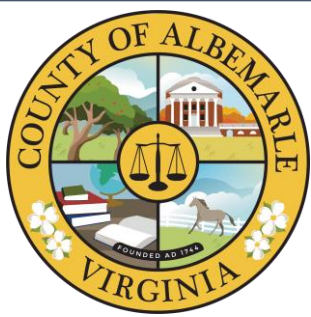
The Authority offers its thanks to David Blount, Deputy Director of the TJPDC, and Gary Wood, CEO and President of Firefly, for their tireless work in preparing and guiding this application to approval. The Authority also offers its thanks to Tamara Holmes, Ph.D, Director of the DHCD Office of Broadband and Governor Ralph Northam for recognizing the value of this proposal in granting this award.

The application received numerous challenges, including several in Albemarle County, which were reviewed by DHCD. Federal funds used in this project do not consider wireless broadband solutions as sufficient to challenge deployment proposals. Given the preponderance of the funds used in this proposal come from Federal funds, challenges brought by Shentel/Beam were not upheld. Other challenges outside of Albemarle were upheld, however, the VATI process provides a 10% allowance for challenged areas. This allowance gives Firefly the ability to continue with limited rescopes.

Ahead of contract completion in the Spring, Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office Director Culp anticipates coordinating with Firefly to expedite construction start within the County.

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2021 Update

Work has begun on this \$2.3M VATI funded project, with trenching work in the Jones Mill project area ongoing and preparatory work completed for several upcoming project areas.



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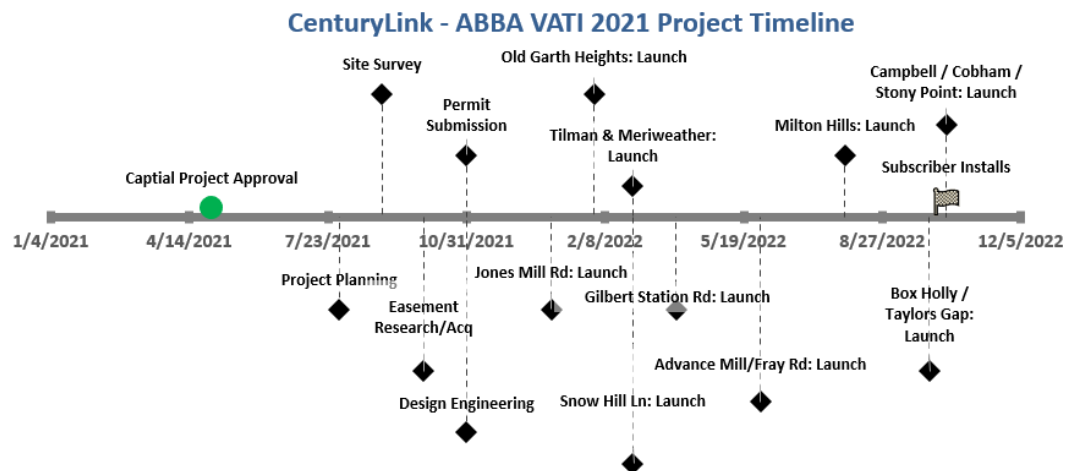
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In coordination with ABBA, the Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (BAAO) has hosted two informational webinars for residents in the project areas and interested members of the public. These projects offer Lumen an opportunity to update the public on the project and offers residents the opportunity to ask questions.

These webinars have provided clear lines of communication for residents, and are supplemented by a project website, managed and hosted by BAAO, that includes meeting video, materials, and an updated Frequently Asked Questions section.

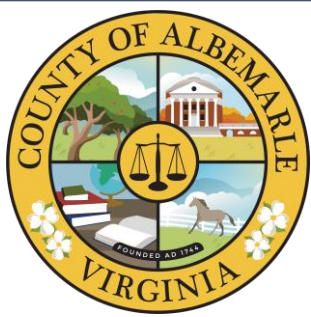
Lumen is launching this project under its Quantum Fiber branding, which should provide for a more streamlined registration process. Issues with the Quantum Fiber website (q.com) have stymied registrations but will hopefully be resolved early in the new year.

The project is still expected to be completed by the fourth quarter of 2022, providing service to 1,675 locations, and extending 80 miles of fiber.



Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2020 Update

The VATI funded fiber broadband program with CenturyLink/Lumen from 2020 has been completed. BAAO continues to work on an after-action assessment of the project. Knowledge gathered during the 2020 project has informed implementation of the 2021 and 2022 projects, especially where resident communications are concerned.



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There remain some reporting requirements with DHCD in order to close out this project, and those are expected to be completed early in 2022.

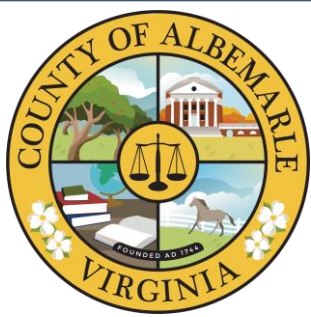
ABBA Public Meetings

Due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations on group gatherings imposed by the Governor's Executive Orders, ABBA meetings during this reporting quarter were held by electronic communication means on either the Zoom platform or Teams platform. Authorized by the County's April 15th and June 17th Continuity of Government Ordinances, the ABBA Resolution of April 22nd, and the Virginia statute signed into law on April 24th permitting ABBA to meet electronically to discuss and transact business necessary to continue its operations.

The public had real time audio-visual access to the July, August, and September ABBA public meetings over Zoom and real time audio access over telephone, both as provided in the lawfully posted meeting notice. The public is always invited to send questions, comments, and suggestions to ABBA through email at broadband@albemarle.org. All public meetings held this quarter were recorded and are available for viewing thru links on the County's website. ABBA meetings are experiencing higher public attendance since the start of the virtual meetings; many public comments expressing concern over the need for broadband during the pandemic.

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

- The Authority considered options for addressing service reliability concerns through action in the State Corporation or Federal Communications Commissions. This matter would be revisited after a Board of Supervisor Work Session on this topic, scheduled for January 12th, 2022.
- A staff estimate places the number of households participating in the Federal Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) at approximately 800, about 10% of eligible households in the County. This program provides up to \$50 per month to eligible households towards wireless



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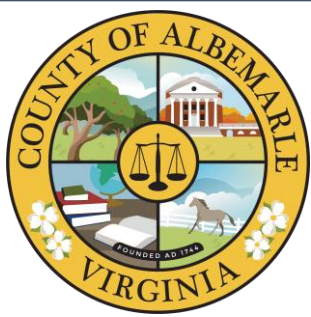
or wire-line broadband service, and is set to transition to the permanent Affordable Connectivity Program in March 2022.

- BAAO staff is considering additional funding options to expedite the connection of a community center at the site of a Rosenwald School restoration. The historic Rosenwald schools were among the first public schools in the nation and served African American communities TKTk. This restoration is taking place along St. John's Road, a historically African American community in the County, and which is part of the VATI 2022 project area.
- Mr. Jaquith updated the board on additional broadband funding opportunities and priorities that may come from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that was recently passed by Congress. Based on the bill language, Mr. Jaquith believes it is likely the State will receive funding approximately equivalent to prior funding (~\$700 million). The new bill does provide new guidance that raises the minimum speeds for broadband service, expanding the areas eligible for investment. Further guidance will come from the FCC and Treasury, throughout 2022.
- Supervisor Liz Palmer was thanked for her leadership and service, on the Board of Supervisors and on the Albemarle Broadband Authority, which she helped create. Ms. Palmer ends 8 years as a Supervisor and has served 4 years as a founding member of the Authority. Her contributions to expanding broadband service in the County have left an indelible mark on the community.

BAAO Updates

BAAO has dedicated considerable staff time to preparations for the VATI 2021 and 2022 projects, while continuing to pursue programs for affordability.

Of note, the office hopes to implement a supplement to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). A permanent evolution of last year's Emergency Broadband Benefit, the ACP provides a \$30 stipend for broadband costs to eligible residents. The permanent program represents a \$20 per month reduction in benefit compared to the EBB. Analysis of local



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broadband costs suggests that the average cost of adequate broadband service remains above \$50 in our region, necessitating a supplement to ensure residents can afford service.

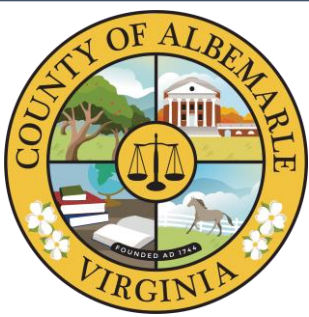
The Office has collaborated with the Department of Social Services and Albemarle County Public Schools to expand outreach as the Emergency Broadband Benefit closes, while also preparing for similar outreach regarding the ACP.

BAAO has continued its collaboration with our incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC), CenturyLink/Lumen, to affect repairs and improvements to DSL and telephony customers experiencing recurring and sustained outages and reliability issues. These service issues are the subject of a Board of Supervisors Work Session on January 12th, 2022. Staff expects to move forward on this work with guidance from Supervisors after that session.

That guidance will continue to inform the development of a BAAO research regarding network resilience and mitigating the impact to residents of network outages. The results of that research informed BAAO policy development which will be implemented and proposed in 2022.

Engaging the community to determine the broadband needs expressed by different cohorts, beginning with a successful collaboration with the Jefferson Area Board of Aging (JABA). A questionnaire was developed in coordination with Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE), distributed by JABA to its centers and to partner organizations, collected and tabulated for analysis, and to act on specific requests for assistance, where possible.

The Office also participated in public engagement efforts, including participating in a Community Day in the Park at Simpson Park, an event at the Rosenwald School restoration project on St. Johns Road and were featured during a local news segment discussing the VATI 2022 announcement.



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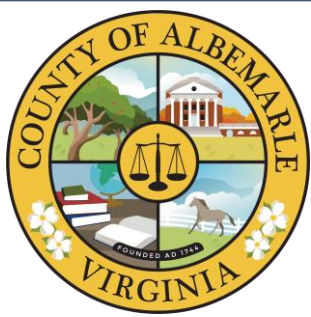
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Plans for Next Quarter

ABBA will continue to prepare for implementation of VATI 2022. Coordination of communications with TJPDC, Firefly and partner municipalities will be an important aspect of future work.

Work will continue on the VATI 2021 project, and ABBA and the Office will continue to monitor progress.

With the announcement of a project that will provide fiber broadband to much of the community, along with new guidance from the FCC and Treasury, the Authority will consider new options for how to direct its efforts to ensure that all residents have access to adequate and reliable broadband service.



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Appendix A – ABBA Summary Budget Report

					Update: 12/15/2021
4-4300-91097-491097-950030-9999 (EXPENSE CODE)					
BROADBAND INCENTIVES>ALBEMARLE BROADBAND AUTHORITY					
	Fund Balance	Commitment/ Projected Expenses	Paid Expenses	Remaining Project Funds	
Current FY22 Balance (includes \$4.5mil in ARPA Appropriation, \$4.37mil of that for VATI 2022)	\$5,806,415.16				
VATI 2020 Project at 8 locations Commitment (PO 2021-7747 CenturyLink)		\$291,300.00	\$291,300.00	\$0.00	
Administrative Fee for ARPA Appropriation		\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00	\$0.00	
VATI 2021 Project Commitment		\$640,000.00	\$0.00		
VATI 2022 Project Commitment		\$4,368,000.00	\$0.00		
	\$88,867.16	\$5,344,300.00	\$336,300.00	\$88,867.16	

End of Report