

Albemarle Broadband Authority “ABBA”

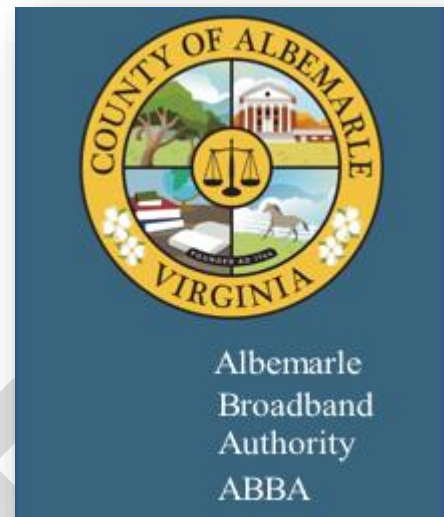
Formed by the County of Albemarle, VA Board of Supervisors

Broadband Status Report 3rd Quarter CY2021

September 30, 2021

The Albemarle Broadband Authority (ABBA) reviewed and is submitting the Broadband Status Report for third quarter calendar year 2021 (July 1, 2021 through September 30, 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*:

TO BE PROVIDED



Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2022 Update

The highlight of this report is the successful submittal of the VATI 2022 application. . The Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) FY22 grant round closed in mid-September, with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) receiving 57 applications representing 84 localities. The total amount of funding requested was just over \$943 million (for about \$750 million in federal and state funding that is expected to be available for funding projects). The applications proposed total matching funds of over \$1.1 billion, with 26 applications having matching funds that exceeded the funds requested.

The TJPDC is the lead applicant, with Firefly Fiber Broadband as the co-applicant, for the Rural Internet Service Expansion (RISE) project that proposes universal coverage for 13 counties (Albemarle, Amherst, Appomattox, Buckingham, Campbell, Cumberland, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson and Powhatan) in the broader Central Virginia region. Other major project partners are Dominion Energy and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative. The RISE request is for \$85.9 million in VATI funding, with a total project cost exceeding \$307 million, to place 4,300 miles of fiber passing 40,077 locations.

The applications are available to review on DHCD’s website. Award announcements tentatively are scheduled for near the end of the calendar year.

Specifics for Albemarle include a total project cost of \$46,685,590; requesting \$9,635,260 from VATI and ABBA providing \$4,368,000 of ARPA funds, the remainder of funds provided by CVEC through their own funds or funds already available through federally funding. The 2 to 3 year project is expected to provide Universal Coverage; reaching all unserved locations.

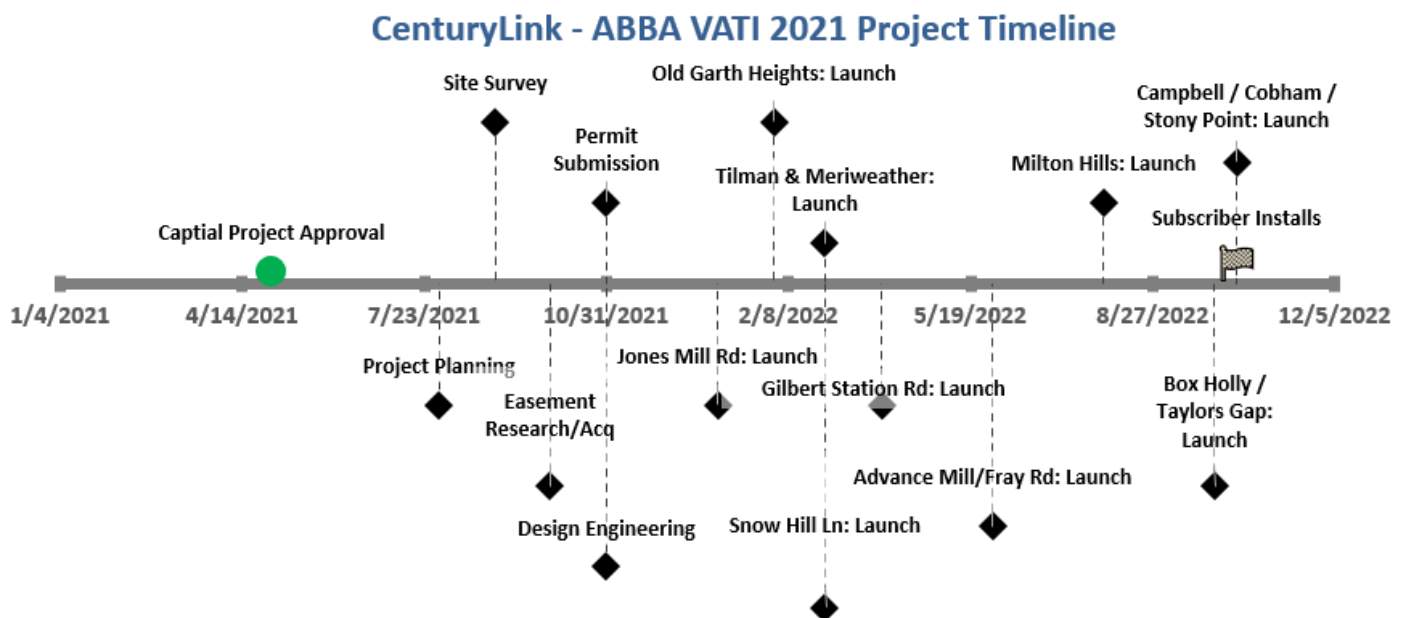
Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2021 Update

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Teams continued work on the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative 2021 Grant projects. ABBA and Albemarle County are to receive \$2,276,110.00 in state provided grant funds. The 18-month program will install over 80 miles of fiber to provide the opportunity for 1,675 locations to connect to fiber internet. The general locations are as follows:

Jones Mill Road, Stony Point & Campbell/Cobham, Snow Hill Ln, Milton Hills, Box Holly/Taylor's Gap, Advance Mills/Fray Rd, Tilman Rd/Meriweather Hill, and Old Garth Heights. CenturyLink provided an update to the Albemarle Broadband Authority on June 25, 2021. Figure 1 is a draft schedule; dates included are subject to change.



Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2020 Update

The VATI funded fiber broadband program with CenturyLink from 2020 continued and all 8 project areas are offering install appointments. ABBA provided feedback and requests for improvement in process at the June 25, 2021 ABBA meeting. CenturyLink explained that there will be major process improvements for everything from customer orders to scheduling installs. As VATI 2020 closes out as the first significant fiber build for CenturyLink in Albemarle County; lessons learned will be applied to VATI 2021.

ABBA Public Meetings

Because of 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.

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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 the County’s Broadband Office email 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.

As part of the ABBA meetings, the ABBA Board discussed additional funding needs and suggested a proposal for additional funds to be added to the Board of Supervisors’ agenda. The ABBA funding request was approved. \$3mil in funding will be available for ABBA use as match grant or for use in direct funded projects. As of the date of this report, the \$3mil in additional funding is scheduled to be appropriated at the July 7, 2021 meeting of the Board of Supervisors. Since that time the Board of Supervisors approved an additional appropriation of \$1.5mil in ARPA funds, providing a grand total of \$4.5mil of ARPA funds for broadband use.

ABBA provided support for the creation of the new Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (Broadband Office). The Director position is filled and a Broadband Program Manager, Jason Inofuentes, was hired. The Broadband Office has started four affordability initiatives:

- Policy development to support additional expenses for low and middle income families when living in a rural area and facing financial hardships as it relates to connecting to fiber.
- The “get emergency broadband benefit program” (EBB). The Broadband Office is spreading the word of the availability of EBB and assisting community members.
- Jefferson Area Board of Aging (JABA) partnership. The Broadband Office is working in collaboration with JABA and the County Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE) to develop a questionnaire and collect broadband feedback from Seniors living in Albemarle.
- Comcast Internet Essentials Partner Program (IEPP). The Broadband office is working with the Finance and Budget department to develop a voucher system such that those unable to afford Comcast Cable (high speed internet) will be able to afford it.

Plans for Next Quarter

ABBA is continuing work on VATI 2022, primarily around planned assistance for workforce and materials and equipment needed to reach successful Universal Coverage. Work continues for VATI 2021. ABBA will support the Broadband Office and the Broadband affordability efforts as they roll out.

ABBA continues to research, monitor, and track the deployment of FirstNet (the US wide public safety network), 5G, and SpaceX’s low earth orbit satellite efforts.

ABBA will continue work to identify ISPs willing to partner to address the unserved areas of Albemarle County. The ABBA mapping and data collection tool is frequently used and continues to help ABBA pinpoint unserved areas. Since

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the pandemic, 550+ unique reports were entered into the system. Many of these reports contain detailed explanations of the issues caused through not having adequate broadband.

End of Report

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