

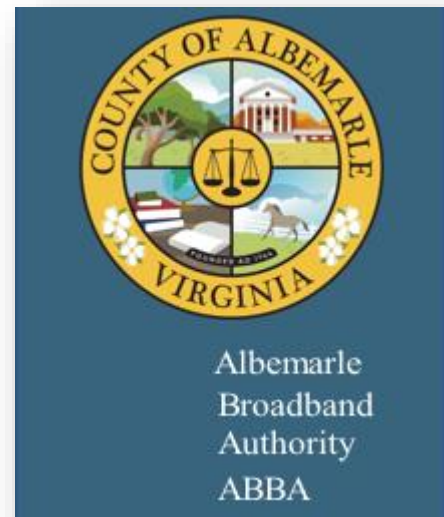
Albemarle Broadband Authority “ABBA”

Formed by the County of Albemarle, VA Board of Supervisors

Broadband Status Report 2nd Quarter CY2021

June 30, 2021

The Albemarle Broadband Authority (ABBA) reviewed and is submitting the Broadband Status Report for second quarter calendar year 2021 (April 1, 2021 through June 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*:



The last year has made it abundantly clear at all levels of government that broadband is not a luxury but a necessity for daily life. This clarity is producing increased funding opportunities from all government sources, reinforcing ABBA’s commitment to move forward with a plan this year to connect all of Albemarle County to broadband. ABBA has executed a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Central Virginia Electric Cooperative/Firefly, Dominion Energy, and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative to develop a plan for Dominion to provide middle mile fiber on their poles while Firefly provides connections to individual homes and businesses. This is a regional effort, including Albemarle and ten other counties. To ensure that we have left no whole-county solution out, we have also launched a request for information (RFI) to solicit expressions of interest and proposals to address all of the 6000 identified unserved and underserved (less than 25/3Mbps internet speed) areas of the county. Between the MOU and the RFI, ABBA expects in the third quarter to apply or be part of an application to DHCD for a Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) grant for 2022 that would encompass the remaining areas of the county. Given the likely magnitude of this project, we look forward to an opportunity to update the BOS on our progress before the next quarterly status report. VATI 2022 applications are due by September 14, 2021.

A plan to have the whole county connected to broadband is an important step. We expect that the existing minimum levels for service, once 10/1, now 25/3, will quickly evolve to something better, perhaps 100/10 or even 100/100. There are many in the county who will not meet this coming standard, and many more who may be paying for higher speeds and intermittently or regularly find they are not getting them, and that the service they have now is not reliable enough for school, work, or even personal needs. We look forward to continuing our work with the Office of Broadband Accessibility and Affordability to continue to meet this challenge.

We continue to work with DHCD and CenturyLink to bring to contract the \$2.3M VATI 2021 award so that work to connect the 1675 locations covered under this award can proceed.

We are in an exciting time, and the opportunities have never been better for us to reach our goal.

Bucky Walsh
ABBA Chair

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Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2022 Update

The highlight of this report is the successful issuance of a Request for Information (RFI) for Broadband Expansion. The new Broadband Office and the Department of Finance and Budget received six responses. These responses included CenturyLink, Comcast, FiberLync, Firefly Fiber Broadband, Lumos, and Nelson Cable providing feedback on the RFI and expressions of interest in areas of the County deemed unserved for Broadband.

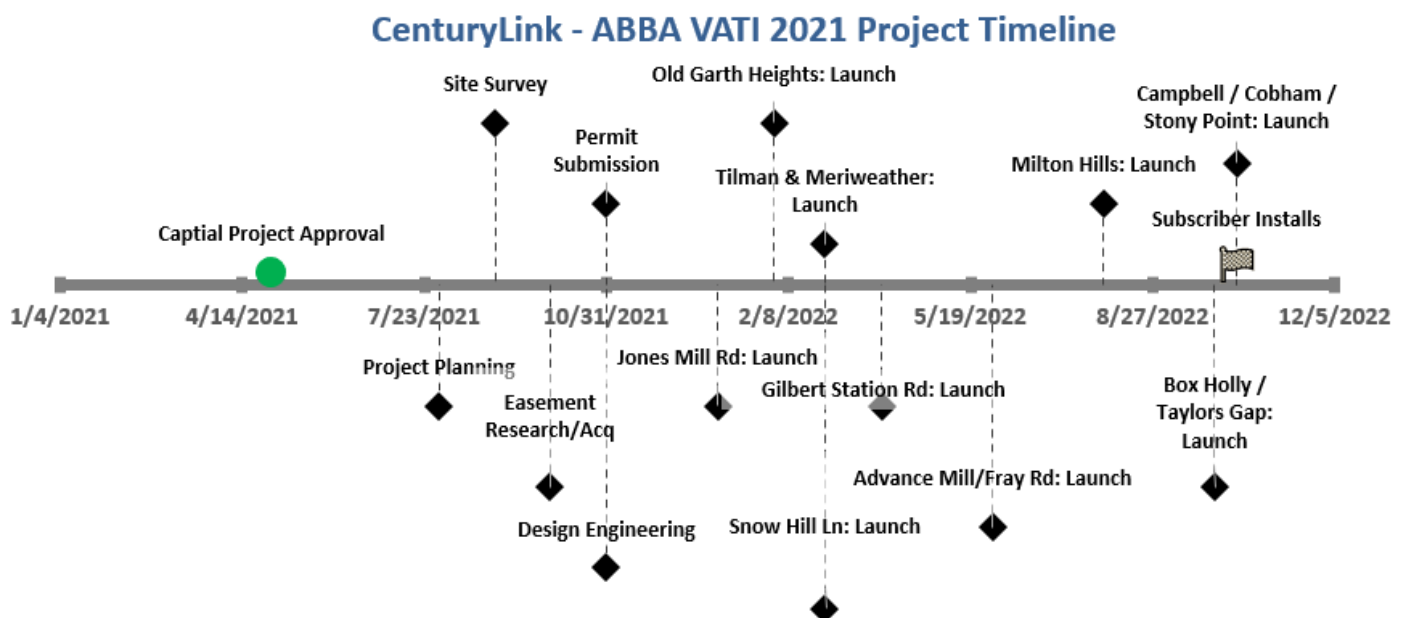
The Broadband Office is coordinating additional meetings to review and discuss the responses. Working with the Albemarle Broadband Authority; a recommendation on how to proceed will be provided to the Board of Supervisors sometime in the month of July or August 2022.

Firefly Fiber Broadband, Dominion Energy, and Rappahannock Electrical Cooperative signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ABBA. The goal is a partnership to bring fiber broadband to the Central Virginia region. ABBA is participating in the partnership. One goal is for the partnership to submit a regional application for VATI 2022 funds.

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) 2021 Update

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/Taylors 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.



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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.

The public had real time audio-visual access to the April, May, and June 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, therefore this funding is yet to be recognized in the ABBA Budget.

ABBA provided support for the creation of the new Broadband Accessibility and Affordability Office (Broadband Office). The Director position is filled and the process to hire a second staff person, Broadband Program Manager, is underway. 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.

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- 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. There will be public input sessions and meetings with ISPs with applications due September 14, 2021. Work continues for VATI 2020 and 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 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.

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Appendix A – ABBA Summary Budget Report

Update 6/16/2021

4-4300-91097-491097-950030-9999 (EXPENSE CODE)					
BROADBAND INCENTIVES					
	Fund Balance	Commitment/ Projected Expenses	Paid Expenses	Remaining Project Funds	
Initial FY21 Balance (includes deposit of VATI 2019 award and reappropriation of unspent FY20 funds to FY21)	\$1,306,415.16				
VATI 2019 Project at Midway Commitment (PO 2021-7298 CVEC)		\$0.00	\$373,248.00	\$0.00	PROJECT CLOSED OUT AND PAYMENT MADE
	\$933,167.16				
VATI 2020 Project at 8 locations Commitment (PO 2021-7747 CenturyLink)		\$291,300.00	\$0.00	\$291,300.00	*CenturyLink prerogative to bill quarterly or in one single invoice
	\$641,867.16				
VATI 2021 Project _____ Commitment (Funds Offered in March, paperwork is in progress)		\$640,000.00	\$0.00		
	\$1,867.16	\$931,300.00	\$373,248.00	\$1,867.16	
Appropriation of \$3,715.00 PT Wages and \$285.00 FICA moved to 950030 Broadband Incentives on 11/4/2020.					

End of Report