



COUNTY OF BEDFORD, VIRGINIA

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ADMINISTRATION

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Bedford County to break ground on Tower and Fiber Optic Infrastructure

By 2020, up to 95% of the county will have access to high speed Internet service

Bedford, Virginia—Bedford County officials, in partnership with Blue Ridge Towers/Brisnet, will come together at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, June 19, 2019 at Big Island Elementary School, to break ground on the first of 10 new communication towers and 21 miles of fiber optic cable to be constructed over the next six months.

The towers and fiber optic cable will help to bring high-speed Internet service to 95 percent of the unserved and underserved areas of the county over the next 12 months. The project is also expected to support homework needs for 6th-12th grade students who will use new Chromebook tablets being distributed this coming school year in Bedford County Public Schools. According to school leaders, the tablets will help address the “homework divide” that is discussed at length in national media for areas that are without high speed Internet.

“Our rural residents and businesses have been asking for broadband service to be extended for nearly a decade now and we are finally in a position to help make that happen,” said County Supervisor Andy Dooley. “High speed Internet service is as important as electrical service in this day and age.”

The tower project will cost more than \$3.5 million, with up to half of that amount covered by two state grants, a \$1.04 million Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) and a \$670,500 grant awarded last week from the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC). The Bedford County Board of Supervisors set aside funds in fiscal year 2020 to support the remaining costs to complete the broadband buildout which is aimed at providing Internet access to county residents within a year.

Del. Kathy Byron, who chairs the Tobacco Commission’s R&D/Broadband Committee, said “Working collaboratively with the Tobacco Commission, Bedford has been an active and engaged partner in



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facilitating these important projects to extend broadband throughout the county,” she said. “Their willingness to engage and work cooperatively with the Commonwealth, the Commission, and the private sector providers will result in more people receiving the access they need.”

A parallel broadband project is running in the far Southern part of the County. Comcast, in partnership with the County, applied for and received a \$3.5 million “Last Mile Broadband Program” grant in 2018 from the Tobacco Commission. Comcast committed to fund the remainder of the project and is planning to contribute more than \$5.8 million to the project. The network expansion project to extend broadband service, as well as all Xfinity Services and the full suite of Comcast Business products and services to more than 7,000 addresses in Smith Mountain Lake, will begin rolling-out to parts of the area this month with an expected completion of the project by year-end.

The 10 new county towers are being erected in pre-studied, strategic locations throughout the county, along with two existing county towers—in Montvale and New London. The towers will be available to support Briscnet’s service rollout to unserved and underserved areas. These towers will be located in the following general locations: Big Island, Boonsboro, Wheats Valley, Huddleston, McGhee Road (Bedford town), Moneta, Hardy, Dumpling Mountain, and Shady Grove.

“This infrastructure will bring broadband to areas that have been unserved, wherever demand for service exists. The towers and 21 miles of fiber optic cable will provide a diversified platform for many different technologies,” said county consultant George N. Condyles, IV, President of the Atlantic Group and senior designer for the project. “Bedford will have multiple service providers that the public will be able to subscribe to, based on their need.”

A citizens advisory group, headed by Allen Boaz of Montvale, has been meeting for more than 10 years regarding this initiative, and has proven instrumental in assisting staff and the Board of Supervisors. The county’s Broadband Authority will own the towers and fiber optic cable and manage any lease agreements with Briscnet and other providers who wish to bring service to residents and businesses.

Briscnet, through its partnership with the county, will offer a range of services to subscribers, at a monthly contract cost of \$49-\$99. The service will be a broadband system that will connect to homes through a wireless canopy of coverage.

To learn more about the Blue Ridge Towers/Briscnet service or sign up for more information, visit <http://briscnet.com/>.

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