

Memorandum

To: Matt Murell, Chairman

From: Kenneth J. Flood, Commissioner

Date: May 23, 2016

Re: Broadband Report

This is the report you requested concerning the progress of our efforts to improve quality broadband access for all Columbia County residents. This report briefly describes the beginnings of our efforts through today.

In early 2014 under the direction of then Chairman Patrick Grattan, a countywide survey was undertaken by my office in order to ascertain a clearer picture of what level of broadband to which residents have access. The survey was widely advertised in the local media, on the County's website and by hardcopy. The response to the survey was excellent with about 1200 response being collected. The survey demonstrated the need and demand for broadband in much of the County.

In mid 2014 in conjunction with Congressman Gibson's office, discussions began with the New York State Broadband office to strategize on how best to improve service. The Broadband Office strongly recommended that a Strategy/Plan be drafted by experts to determine what infrastructure exists and how best to expand that service to increase the number of households who have broadband.

In the fall 2014 as the county budget was being developed, my office recommended funds be allocated so that a firm could be engaged to develop a strategy for the County. In the County's 2015 budget, \$40,000 was appropriated to engage a consultant. In accordance with law, a Request for Proposals ("RFP") was issued and four responses were received and evaluated.

On March 11, 2015 the Board of Supervisors approved to enter into agreement with ECC Technologies for their services. A kickoff meeting was held with ECC Technologies in late March and work began in earnest as New York State was planning to release its New New York Broadband Program and the \$500M.

On December 1st a public information meeting was held to solicit comments on the proposed plan draft by ECC Technologies. Comments were generally positive and useful. These comments were then incorporated into a near final draft plan. As the County was finalizing its strategy NYS released a request for information on its draft Broadband funding program. Columbia County submitted extensive comments on the program's proposed structure.

Early 2016 NYS released the program including FAQ's. In response to one question submitted by Columbia County Planning;

"Q. I am requesting a clarification of what areas in Columbia County are eligible for Phase I funding. As I understand the RFP Guidelines, Fairpoint, Charter and Time Warner areas are ineligible is that correct? Also Verizon service territory eligible or ineligible?"

A. A list of CB's eligible for the Program is provided on the BPO's website and can be sorted by County. As discussed in the RFP Guidelines, the Time Warner Cable/Charter NYS Franchise Areas, and unclaimed Connect America Fund (CAF) territories are ineligible for Phase 1. The Fairpoint CAF areas have not been excluded."

It was clear that the program favored private providers as application deposits were \$100,000 and applications would be rated as “reverse auction” format. Providers in the County were contacted and encouraged to apply. ECC provided an updated strategy to the public and Supervisors on the plan as well as funding program. Consequently, ECC Technologies recommended that the County alter its strategy to take advantage funds that are available on the federal level through a program named the “E-Rate” program. This strategy proposes to expand the fiber backbone by using E-Rate funds to connect schools and public libraries and through the additional fiber, providers could expand their coverage area.

On April 8th at Columbia Greene Community College, Congressman Gibson held a meeting for residents and elected officials to receive an update on broadband activities and funding programs. As a result of that meeting the County has tentatively adopted this strategy.

Most recently, along with Congressman Gibson’s staff, discussions are being held on how best to advance this project. Funding deadline for the next round of E-Rate monies will not be until next spring but much work needs and will be done over the next 8-10 months. These decisions will put Columbia County residents in a very good position to have improved broadband accessibility.