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courtesy photo/Charleston City Fiber Project

The West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council is commissioned to enhance the development of plans, processes and procedures for extending broadband access into underserved and unserved areas of the state.

Looking Beyond Our Immediate Borders

Change In Attitude Needed To Advance Broadband In West Virginia

A message from WV Broadband Enhancement Council Chairman Robert Hinton

It is no secret that West Virginia significantly trails regionally, nationally and globally when it comes to access to scalable and reliable broadband level connectivity. Over the past year, the Council has played an integral part in magnifying the message that broadband connectivity has moved beyond optional to essential.

One of the Council's primary objective is to empower communities throughout West Virginia by providing access to the resources needed to facilitate broadband expansion at the local level. The Council is forging partnerships between State and Federal agencies, communities and internet service providers to work cohesively on infrastructure and planning projects.

It is clear that innovative partnerships to improve broadband connectivity must be part of an overall economic development strategy. Collaboration is needed among Federal, State and local leaders, internet service providers, residents and businesses.

Communities throughout West Virginia are ready to take on this challenge with the state's first allocation of CDBG funding. To be



successful, we must recognize that we, as communities, have the power to expand broadband infrastructure and improve connectivity throughout West Virginia. The level of service West Virginia deserves exists and we must pursue it with an innovative and tenacious attitude.

The Council is committed to the bold pursuit of broadband on behalf of residents and businesses throughout West Virginia in 2018. Join us in this endeavor by learning more about broadband's importance to West Virginia and getting involved in community efforts to establish or enhance broadband. This proactive attitude is a must for West Virginia to get connected and compete on a global scale.

News from Capitol Hill

The West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council has extended invitations to West Virginia's Congressional representatives to provide a broadband-related column to this newsletter. Columns will be featured as they become available.

Investing In Broadband Will Connect West Virginia To The World

By U.S. Representative Evan Jenkins (R-W.Va.)

Now, more than ever, broadband is a powerful tool that West Virginia students, job creators and communities need to compete and succeed in a global digital economy. Access to fast, reliable broadband internet service is vital to diversifying West Virginia's economy and providing more jobs for Mountaineers. A good job solves a lot of problems, and connecting our state through broadband will create a lot of new jobs and opportunities across our great state.

President Trump was right when he said this executive action and memorandum are "the first steps to expand(ing) access to broadband internet in rural America so you can compete on a level playing field." It is imperative that we attract new businesses and industries to West Virginia, but many rural areas lack the broadband access we need to be competitive.

Investing in broadband pays off. Rural broadband has directly added more than \$155 million to West Virginia's economy and \$17 billion nationwide, according to the Hudson Institute. As President Trump and Congress consider a major infrastructure initiative this year, broadband needs to be part of our investments.



I've made economic diversification a top priority of my work in Congress — and broadband expansion plays a critical role in achieving this goal and attracting new industries. Through my role on the House Appropriations Committee, I helped secure funding for important programs that make it affordable for rural areas to construct or improve broadband services in their communities.

Broadband access is a necessity for small businesses, but it is also vital for education and medical professionals. I've supported continued funding for the Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants program, which delivers broadband access to education and healthcare professionals. This program makes a difference by connecting teachers with distance learners, or health-care professionals with sick patients.

It is also vital for our schools, particularly for students in STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and math. As President Trump said in a speech in June 2017, "We must also ensure that these students have the broadband internet access they need in order to succeed and thrive in this new and very modern and very changed economy and world."

I will continue to work with my colleagues in West Virginia's congressional delegation to improve our state's access to broadband. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito has introduced important legislation in the Senate, the Gigabit Opportunity Act, which target areas most in need by directing investment to low-income and rural areas, streamlining regulations and eliminating barriers to investment. I am a proud co-sponsor of the GO Act in the House.

Investing in broadband creates jobs, spurs investments, diversifies the economy, strengthens educational opportunities and improves the quality of life for everyone. In the coming year, I'll continue to work with President Trump, Sen. Capito and my colleagues to help us expand broadband so we can invest in West Virginia — and the people who call West Virginia home.

Here's Looking At You, Barbour County!

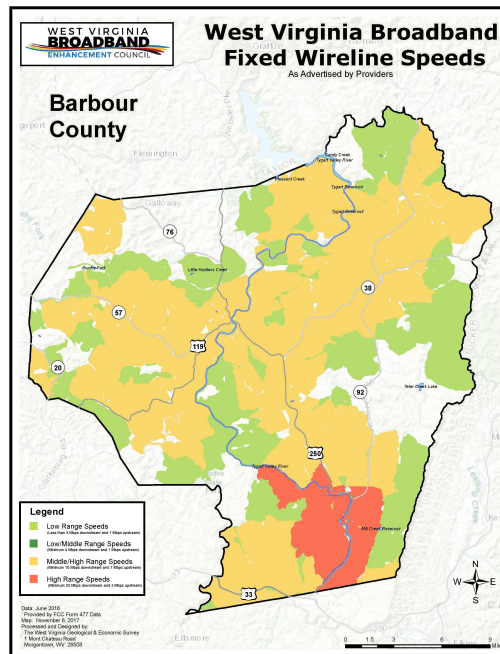
The West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council has completed the first iterations of static mapping for all West Virginia counties based upon Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Form 477 data submitted by internet service providers. All county maps are available to print, save and download at the Council [website](#).

Beginning this month, maps detailing broadband fixed wireline speeds in each of the state's 55 counties will be featured. Here's a look at the FCC Form 477 data for Barbour County. Click on

the image for a larger view.

The mapping project was completed in partnership with the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey with data based upon the June 2016 FCC 477 data reporting period. Mapping based upon the December 2016 reporting period is currently in development.

In October of 2017, the Council launched the [West Virginia Speed Test](#) to map the presence and level of broadband service within each community and throughout the entire state. This data will also be used to assist communities as they pursue greater access to broadband. The speed test allows state residents and business owners to measure actual internet speeds. This information will be reported to the West Virginia Legislature and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to guide the Council in its mission in facilitating broadband service to unserved and underserved areas of the state.



State Awards First WV CDBG Broadband Development Grants

Governor Jim Justice announced on February 1, that for the first time in West Virginia, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are being dedicated to broadband planning and infrastructure projects.

Gov. Justice said, "My administration is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all West Virginians. If West Virginia expects to be competitive with the rest of the world, we must have high speed internet connectivity, and this is going to help see this through."

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides CDBG funds to the State of West Virginia. HUD has directed states to consider the availability of broadband in low- to moderate-income areas.



HUD acknowledges the importance of internet connectivity, stating in its Digital Opportunity Demonstration announcement, "Knowledge is a pillar to achieving the American Dream - a catalyst for upward mobility as well as an investment that ensures each generation is as successful as the last. Nations and local communities that cultivate access to global knowledge will thrive in an increasingly complex and technologically oriented world, while those that do not will struggle to keep pace."

2017 CDBG Broadband Development Projects

1. **Clay County Commission (Lead Applicant):** This project is to develop a broadband feasibility plan for Calhoun, Clay and Roane counties.
2. **Fayette County Commission:** This study will enable Fayette County Commission to determine last mile connectivity solutions.
3. **Gilmer County Commission:** This plan will enable the Gilmer County Commission to pursue a broadband internet network.
4. **Hampshire County Commission:** This project will expand the county-owned backbone fiber system into eastern Hampshire County and the Capon Bridge municipal area.
5. **Jackson County Commission:** The Jackson County Commission will complete infrastructure improvements and equipment installation to serve the Sandyville area.
6. **Mingo County Commission:** The Mingo County Commission will develop a strategic plan for broadband service in the Town of Gilbert to support the region's tourism industry.
7. **Morgan County Commission** - The county will develop a plan for broadband internet service through utilization of the existing tower structures and facilities.
8. **Nicholas County Commission** - This CDBG pilot project will merge the installation of water and fiber infrastructure in the Hinkle Mountain and Little Laurel areas of Richwood.
9. **Taylor County Commission (Lead Applicant):** The Taylor, Doddridge, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia and Preston County Commissions will partner to update the area's Broadband

Strategic Plan.

10. **Tyler County Commission** - This broadband study will map Tyler County's path toward affordable and reliable broadband service.
11. **Webster County Commission (Lead Applicant)**: The Webster County Commission is the lead applicant in developing a regional plan to bring reliable and affordable broadband internet service to Webster, Fayette, Greenbrier, Nicholas and Pocahontas counties.
12. **Wyoming County Commission (Lead Applicant)**: The Wyoming County Commission is the lead applicant in developing a plan to bring reliable and affordable broadband internet service to McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh, Summers and Wyoming counties.



WVU Appalachian Law Symposium Explores Economic Benefits Of Rural Broadband

The West Virginia University College of Law presented the Appalachian Justice Symposium in Morgantown on February 23-24.

The event is part of the Appalachian Justice Initiative which emphasizes the advancement of programming and projects designed to address poverty and related issues in West Virginia through legal scholarship, policy advocacy, legal services and outreach.

Two separate sessions emphasized the importance of broadband in West Virginia: Economic Development Challenges in West Virginia and Broadband Expansion in West Virginia.

Priya Baskaran, Associate Professor of Law and Director of the WVU Entrepreneurship and Innovation Law Clinic (EILC), noted that the discussion of broadband as it relates to economic development is one of hope.

"The Law Clinic provides free legal services to entrepreneurs and nonprofits across West Virginia. Improving broadband access means helping our clients innovate and compete in today's knowledge-based economy. We are thrilled that the State of West Virginia is providing resources in building this vital infrastructure," Baskaran said.

The Council is pleased to partner with the EILC to advance broadband in West Virginia.



Federal Programs To Invest In Broadband Development Projects

Federal agencies are advancing grant and loan programs for broadband development in rural communities.

The Rural Utility Services (RUS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development office, is expected to announce the opening of the 2018 application cycle within weeks. Potential applicants are advised to register in [System of Award Management, Dun and Bradstreet](#) and have a [Level 1 of E-Authentication](#). Visit the USDA RUS [website](#) to learn more about the broadband grant and loan programs and eligibility requirements.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has announced its Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative for fiscal year 2018. This federal funded initiative targets coal-impacted communities and regions by cultivating economic diversity, part of which includes enhancing access to and use of broadband services.

Over the next two months, ARC will host free workshops across the region for community leaders, industry representatives, and economic development officials to learn about the objectives of the 2018 POWER Initiative, eligibility criteria, and guidelines for competitive funding proposals. To learn more about this initiative, visit the ARC Power [website](#).

Information for a USDA Broadband Grant workshop is listed below in the **WV Connected** section.

Classroom To The Living Room

This is a Continuing Series of articles highlighting industries, businesses and institutions utilizing internet connectivity to enhance services for the state's residents and businesses.

The West Virginia Remote Online Collaborative Knowledge System ([WVROCKS](#)) was created to make college more accessible to all West Virginians. The WVROCKS web portal is a collaborative effort between the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and its telecommunications and computing services branch, the West Virginia Network (WVNET).

Enrollment in WVROCKS courses continues to grow since its introduction in the Fall of 2012. More than 900 students from five institutions have enrolled and over 12,582 credit hours have been earned via the portal since its inception.



WVROCKS has relied on collaborative partnerships as well as the guidance and input of key leaders from West Virginia higher education institutions offering the Regents Bachelor of Arts Degree (RBA). This is where the teamwork to create a sustainable online program for adult learners begins.

The convenience and flexibility of WVROCKS contributes to an impressive retention rates of a 93 percent attendance rate, a 92 percent completion rate, and an 84 percent pass rate.

Those retention rates would not be possible without the assistance of a vibrant team. Dr. Roxann Humbert is the program founder and current Executive Director. Dr. Mary Stewart is the Director of Distance Learning and Education Services. In addition to these program leaders, the RBA Coordinators at the participating schools, and the 80-plus faculty members from institutions of higher education in the state who support the program's mission and goals, WVROCKS systems and processes touch every department at WVNET and all have a vital role in WVROCKS' success. This includes the Media Services, Systems, Network Operations Center, Applications, TelCom, and Business offices. WVROCKS is centrally located in WVNET's Distance Learning & Educational Services Group in Morgantown.

Notable American author John C. Maxwell statement that "Teamwork makes the dream work" was only part of his message, the latter part of the quote is, "but a vision becomes a nightmare when the leader has a big dream and a bad team." This is where the real message behind the lesson can be found. Fortunately for WVROCKS, its leaders had a big dream and a very good team, and that's why West Virginia will ROCK On!



USDA Broadband Development Workshop

Richard Jenkins, Telecommunications Representative for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, leads a grant workshop in Beckley to guide attendees through the agency's federal grant programs for broadband development. The USDA will conduct this workshop again March 8 in Morgantown. For more information and to register, call 304-284-4885.

Mark Your Calendar

Next Broadband Enhancement Council Meeting:

Thursday, March 8, 2018; 10:00 a.m. State Capitol, Building 3, Suite 800 Conference Room.

BroadbandUSA Conference: Tennessee Broadband Summit Conference: "Creating Partnerships to Ensure Access for All" March 20, 2018. Registration information is [here](#).

Resources

Presentation: ["Qualifying and Bidding in the FCC's CAF II Reverse Auction"](#)

West Virginia Broadband In The News

[Last Mile To Be Studied In Fayette County](#)

[Richwood Area To Get Infrastructure Advancement](#)

[Alderson Broadband To Offer Cyber Security Program](#)

[Grants To Assist West Virginia Toward Improving Rural Connectivity](#)

[\\$20 Million Available To Appalachian Communities](#)

To read past West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council Newsletters, click [here](#).

