



AUGUST 2018  
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**West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council** ...

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Are you a part of a group that wants to improve local communities through business development? View our guide to forming Broadband Cooperative Associations to see how you can make an impact in your community. Learn more by clicking this link ➡ <https://bit.ly/2B0VUDH>



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**ABOUT WEST VIRGINIA BROADBAND  
ENHANCEMENT COUNCIL**

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The West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council was formed in 2016 to provide for and oversee the d...

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The West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council has its own Facebook page which features timely updates about broadband development around the state.

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

## A United Voice For Broadband Connectivity

*A message from WV Broadband Enhancement Council Chairman Robert Hinton*

The Broadband Council's Infrastructure Committee convened in July to review important policies related to the development of broadband in West Virginia.

Numerous representatives of the state's internet service providers (ISPs) participated in this meeting. These representatives stated unanimously that access to state-owned highway rights-of-way (ROWs) at little or no cost is critical to accelerating the expansion of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved communities. West Virginia faces many challenges when it comes to broadband expansion and access to the ROW should not be one of them.



Governor Jim Justice voiced his strong support for policies that promote and encourage broadband development through utilization of the state highway ROW. Recognizing the need to improve connectivity in West Virginia, Governor Justice ordered the removal of barriers to broadband development and stated confidence that the West Virginia Legislature would implement additional policies conducive to utility development with a particular emphasis on broadband.

The Council maintains that West Virginia must utilize all available assets, including its proximity to major internet exchanges and existing highway infrastructure systems, to position the state for greater connectivity and economic growth. We will continue working with the West Virginia Division of Highways to develop policies that incorporate the needs of West Virginians who remain very concerned about the pace of broadband development in our state.

The Council appreciates the leadership of Governor Justice on this critical issue and the partnership between the West Virginia Legislature and numerous state agencies that recognize broadband as essential economic infrastructure. With the development of balanced ROW policies, ISPs will be more encouraged to develop broadband infrastructure, ultimately leading to a more connected West Virginia.

## Microsoft Selects Mingo County For Its Airband Grant Fund Initiative

The pursuit of high-speed connectivity in Mingo County took a dramatic step forward with the Microsoft Corp. announcement of West Virginia's inclusion in its 2018 Airband Grant Fund Initiative.



Microsoft

The Airband initiative is designed to help bring broadband internet access to rural communities through innovative technologies. Houston-based Skylark Wireless was selected to provide affordable broadband service in Mingo County, one of only eight U.S. communities to receive this grant in 2018.

"Skylark Wireless is working to ensure the citizens of Mingo County have broadband access they need to connect and compete with their more urban neighbors," said [Shelley McKinley](#), Microsoft's head of Technology and Corporate Responsibility, in a press release. "The use of innovative technologies like TV white spaces will help close the broadband gap in West Virginia."

The Airband Grant Fund is part of the [Microsoft Airband Initiative](#), which aims to help close the broadband access gap in rural America by 2022.

"Skylark Wireless is excited to be deploying its cutting-edge Massive MIMO platform in West Virginia," said

Clayton W. Shepard, founder and CTO of Skylark Wireless. "This next-generation wireless network will bring true high-speed affordable broadband internet to thousands of people who need it most, which wouldn't have been possible without the Microsoft Airband Grant Fund."

The Council congratulates Mingo County on this major step forward and welcomes the Microsoft Airband Initiative to West Virginia.

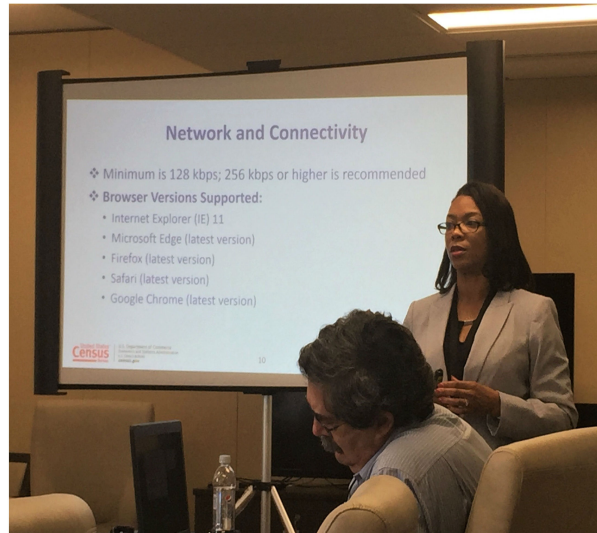
### **United States Census 2020**

## **Internet Connectivity To Be A Crucial Component Of 2020 U.S. Census**

Reliable internet broadband connectivity and a skilled digital workforce will be essential for West Virginia in the 2020 U.S. Census.

This message was delivered by Roxanne Wallace, Area Manager of the U.S. Census Bureau in Philadelphia, during her presentation to the Broadband Council at its August meeting. Wallace said efforts are underway now to ensure the 2020 Census properly reflects the state, noting that the U.S. Constitution-mandated event determines the allocation of House of Representative seats and more than \$675 billion in federal funding across the nation.

Wallace said the upcoming census will be gathered primarily online. To ensure the highest proficiency, the U.S. Census Bureau is hiring and training a significant workforce. The state's Census Bureau office is located in Beckley and hiring being conducted in 11 different job categories. To apply, visit [USA Jobs](#) or call 1-888-480-1639 for more information.



Realizing the importance of accurate Census data in West Virginia, the Council looks forward to working with Wallace and her team to address West Virginia's connectivity challenges.

## **Now Is The Time To Plan For \$600 Million USDA Rural Broadband Program**

Time equals details. That was the theme of the Broadband e-Connectivity Workshop held at the West Virginia High Technology Foundation complex in Fairmont, sponsored by the state USDA Rural Development office in partnership with the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council.



The workshop was a preliminary review of the [e-Connectivity Pilot Project](#), which will provide \$600 million in financial assistance to eligible rural communities that currently do not have broadband service. The program aims to expedite loans and grants for the costs of construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities and equipment for broadband service in eligible rural areas.

Richard Jenkins, telecommunication program manager for the USDA Rural Utilities Services division, said now is the time to start preparing for the program which may officially open for applications in October. Jenkins noted the

importance of making contacts with potential providers to discuss projects, noting that public-private partnerships are a critical factor.

Community leaders are strongly encouraged to provide the FCC with [public comments](#) to shape final program details. Potential applicants must also register in the [SAM](#), [Duns](#) and [eAuthentication](#) systems.

Kris Warner, director of the state USDA Rural Development office, welcomed participants representing county commissions, internet service providers, economic development authorities and regional planning and development councils. The USDA anticipates sponsoring an additional workshop in October when the application process for the e-Connectivity Pilot Program is officially launched.

## Grant Gives Gilmer County A Pathway To Fixed Wireless Broadband Solutions

*This is a continuing series which features the Program Year 2017 recipients of the HUD CDBG funding for Broadband Development.*

The internet connectivity in Gilmer County is similar to many counties around the state. Broadband is available in select areas where anchor institutions are located but it quickly dissipates at the outer edges of the communities and into the rural areas. The Gilmer County Commission and its Economic Development Association have taken an important step to reverse this by securing a HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for broadband development.

Gilmer County officials are utilizing this grant to secure a professional design firm to design a tower system that will incorporate existing county and state telecommunication assets with new towers to provide fixed wireless broadband service.

"This design plan is focused on bring broadband connectivity to those residents and businesses whose current options for service are either limited to solutions which are not broadband or are unserved by what is currently available," said Shane Whitehair, the Region 7 Planning and Development Council executive director and project administrator. "Since securing the CDGB grant, the Braxton County Commission has been accepted as a party to the grant. Broadband delivery does not stop at borders and adding Braxton County is going to further enhance broadband connectivity to this region."

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides CDBG funds to the State of West Virginia and has directed states to consider the availability of broadband in low- to moderate-income areas. For Program Year 2017, Gov. Jim Justice announced more than \$1.5 million in CDBG funding be dedicated to broadband projects. The deadline to submit a [2018 application](#) is October 30.



### Broadband Council Goes Social; Sets Goal Of 3,000 Friends

Supporters of the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council can now 'officially' like the Council and help share its message of greater connectivity. The Council launched its Facebook page to share broadband-related news from around the state with a goal of reaching 3,000 West Virginians in three months.

The Council invites readers to connect, like the page and visit frequently. Readers can also help the



**TILSON**  
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

### Tilson Technology Brings Broadband Expertise To West Virginia

The Broadband Council has partnered with Tilson Technology Management for technical consulting services on a vast array of telecommunication issues.

"The Council is pleased to have Tilson Technology on board. The Tilson team will be a valuable resource in navigating more complex broadband issues and improving connectivity in West Virginia," said Council Chairman Rob Hinton. "The company has a well-established record of successful partnerships with several states and we look forward to putting

Council reach a wider audience by sharing the page with friends who share the Council's mission to expand affordable and reliable broadband service to the state's unserved and underserved areas of the state.

A link to the page is located at the end of this newsletter or search "West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council" from the Facebook main page.

this expertise to work in West Virginia."

Tilson is currently assisting the Council in its assessment of right-of-way fee structures in place for both contiguous and demographically comparable states. This information will contribute to the development of policies that encourage broadband infrastructure development in West Virginia.

## Map of the Month

### Mingo County

Each month, the Broadband Enhancement Council will feature a map detailing broadband fixed wireline speeds based upon current FCC data. All county maps are available to print, save and download at the Council [website](#).

Mingo County is located in the state's southern coalfield region. This county has experienced major declines in the coal industry. Local leaders are pursuing numerous improvements to help diversify the local economy. Broadband development is a critical component of the county's economic future.

The Mingo County Commission is a partner in a 2017 Community Development Block Grant award for broadband planning development (see *related article above*).

The Mingo County Commission is teaming with the Town of Gilbert to enhance broadband connectivity in the surrounding business and tourist areas, notably the Hatfield-McCoy Trails system.

## WV Connected



*"Connecting Rural West Virginia" was the theme of a federal grants broadband funding workshop sponsored by Congressman Alex Mooney, held August 14 at BridgeValley Community and Technical College in South Charleston. Presenting at the session were (from left) Broadband Council Chairman Robert Hinton; Richard Jenkins, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Kelly Workman, W.Va. Development Office; and Mark Defalco, Appalachian Regional Commission.*

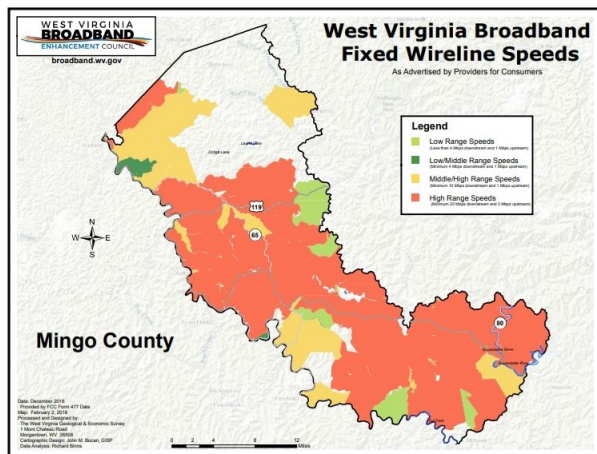
### Mark Your Calendar

#### Next Broadband Enhancement Council Meeting:

Thursday, September 13, 2018, 10:00 a.m. State Capitol, Building 3, Suite 800 Conference Room.

**BroadbandUSA webinar:** Innovative and Emerging Broadband Technologies: Providing Economical Alternatives for Rural Broadband Access. September 18, 2018. To register, click [here](#).

**Mobility Fund Access comment period extended**



Click on the image for a larger view.

The Broadband Council urges commercial and residential internet users in this region to test their internet speed through the [West Virginia Speed Test](#) portal.

Data obtained through the speed test will support the pursuit of funding for broadband infrastructure development.

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

Please note the FCC has extended the [challenge window](#) for Mobility Fund II for an additional 90 days. Challengers will have until November 26, 2018, to submit speed test data in support of a challenge.

## West Virginia Broadband In The News

[Several WV Providers Competing For Broadband Funding](#)

[Fayette County Residents Urged To Take Speed Test](#)

[Capito Connect Program Enters Fourth Year](#)

[Bluefield Working Toward High Speed Network For Downtown Business District](#)

[Change In Law Could Slow Broadband Expansion](#)

[Downtown Huntington Now Has Free Wi-Fi](#)

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