

News Release

More Than \$10 Million in Grants Awarded to Expand Charles County Rural Broadband Access



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Charles County Board of Commissioners are pleased to announce that [Governor Larry Hogan and Lieutenant Governor Boyd K. Rutherford awarded grant funding from the Fiscal 2022 Connect Maryland: Network Infrastructure Grant Program](#), totaling more than \$10 million, to expand broadband access in Charles County. Two grants were awarded; one to Comcast Cable Communications, LLC to provide rural broadband to the Dentsville/Charlotte Hall area, and one to ThinkBig Networks, LLC to provide rural broadband to the North Nanjemoy area. The state grants will fund a portion of these broadband expansion projects, with additional funding coming from Charles County and the two broadband vendors. These grants will serve an additional 1,346 residents in Charles County.

Access to broadband in rural areas is an issue throughout the nation, and Charles County is no exception. Although the more populated areas of our county have access to high-speed internet, there are remaining homes and businesses in the less-populated areas that do not. For this reason, the Board of Commissioners included Infrastructure/Services, which included broadband access, in their Goals and Objectives.

"We are pleased that Comcast and ThinkBig have received this grant, which allows expanded broadband access in some of the county's rural areas. With this expansion, more Charles County residents and businesses will have access to the technology they need to stay connected to school, work, and commercial activities," said Commissioner President Reuben B. Collins, II, Esq. "I applaud the tireless efforts of the Rural Broadband Task Force to develop and move forward a successful plan to address the county's most urgent broadband needs."

Over the last several years, the county's Rural Broadband Task Force has worked to close the digital divide in the county's rural areas. Under the leadership of Deputy County Administrator Deborah Hall and Chief Information Officer Evelyn Jacobson, the task force successfully mapped areas of the county where access was needed, presented recommendations for expanded access, and sought out grant opportunities to pay for it. During this time, the county has negotiated agreements with providers to serve close to 3,000 rural residents through broadband expansion projects exceeding \$19 million. The Rural Broadband Task Force is composed of representatives from multiple county departments, Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, Charles County Public Schools, and community stakeholders. The complete member list of the Rural Broadband Taskforce is located at www.CharlesCountyMD.gov/our-county/rural-broadband-in-charles-county.

The support from our partnership agencies, such as Comcast Cable Communications, LLC.; ThinkBig Networks LLC.; Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative; and Charles County Public Schools, as well as support from county residents were instrumental in receiving these grants. The continued support from, and collaboration with, our partnership agencies will be essential to bringing this project to its successful completion.

“We’re proud to partner with Charles County and the State of Maryland to bring our advanced services, including gigabit speed broadband service, to unserved county residents,” said Michael Parker, Senior Vice President of Comcast’s Beltway Region. “This partnership will bolster the hundreds of millions of dollars Comcast has already invested in the state of Maryland to connect residents and businesses to our smart, fast and reliable network. Technology is a powerful driver of innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth, and we’re committed to helping individuals and communities fully participate in the digital economy.”

ThinkBig Networks CEO Mark Wagner said, “I am pleased that this grant allows us to use our expertise in providing a valuable service to Charles County residents and we look forward to beginning construction.”

The county will work with both providers to negotiate a favorable Memorandum of Understanding and construction is expected to begin in late 2022.

For more information about the Maryland Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program, visit <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Broadband/Pages/default.aspx>.

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