



Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 18, 2020

COUNTY OFFICIALS EXTEND GRATITUDE TO RESIDENTS FOR OUTSTANDING PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL BROADBAND SURVEY

(The Counties of Bland & Pulaski, Virginia) – On November 13th, Bland & Pulaski Counties announced a regional initiative to study broadband internet accessibility and capacity. This study is part of a larger three county project, which includes Montgomery County, in correlation with Appalachian Power and private internet service providers in the deployment of fiberoptic and other broadband infrastructure to unserved and under-served areas of the three localities. The survey of residents was the first step in the study, which has concluded with significant participation from residents, with 1,346 completed surveys (667 Bland / 679 Pulaski).

“We are excited to be working with our citizens, Appalachian Power, and with our neighboring counties on this project,” stated Adam Kidd, Chair of the Bland County Board of Supervisors. “This is a united initiative to improve connectivity in our communities that will have lasting positive impact into the future.” Residents of the two counties were asked to complete a survey to assist in obtaining information for the regional broadband study. The main goal of the study is to identify those areas of need in which a plan can be developed with Appalachian Power and internet service providers to develop the appropriate infrastructure to rectify broadband needs. The response rate of the surveys were 20% of the households in Bland County (667/3,356) and 4% of the households in Pulaski County (679/17,302). “We were hoping to have strong citizen participation with the surveys, so we were very pleased when we received such a high level of citizen response,” stated Joseph Guthrie, Chair of the Pulaski County Board of Supervisors. “The amount of completed surveys and the data they yielded will go a long way to understanding our need for broadband, and perhaps be the key to deploying services across our rural counties. At this time, we remain quite optimistic that we can advance this project, and we look forward to our continued work with Appalachian Power and our regional partners.”

The first step in this regional broadband initiative is the study of existing infrastructure and to determine the capacity of download and upload speeds available to residents and businesses. Montgomery County has already completed its comprehensive broadband study and Bland and Pulaski Counties are working together with the same consultants as Montgomery County, Thompson & Litton / Blue Ridge Advisory Services Group, to analyze the current broadband capacity. Now that the survey portion is completed, consultants will begin working with Appalachian Power over the next couple of months analyzing the data and developing potential network designs.

The project involves installing fiber optic cable on Appalachian Power’s utility poles, with the added benefit of providing a more robust communications platform for the company’s deployment of new electric meters and distribution automation (DA). The new smart meters and DA equipment improve service reliability for power customers. Space on Appalachian Power’s middle-mile fiber infrastructure is then leased to internet service providers. Appalachian Power’s pilot broadband projects are made possible by the 2018 Grid Security and Transformation Act, 2019 Broadband Pilot Program legislation.

Appalachian Power is currently developing a preliminary middle-mile fiber design. Following the broadband study of Bland and Pulaski Counties, Appalachian Power’s intention is to file an application seeking project approval from the Virginia State Corporation Commission in the first half of 2021. The three-county project is projecting to serve approximately 15,000 unserved broadband customers. This pilot project will require approval from the Virginia State Corporation Commission. State and federal grant funds may be available to assist the localities and internet service providers with the last-mile infrastructure buildout.

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