

**RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY  
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE**

3 Library Road - P.O. Box 519  
Washington, Virginia 22747-0519  
Phone: (540) 675-5330 Fax: (540) 675-5331  
www.rappahannockcountyva.gov

Board of Supervisors  
Debbie P. Donehey, Chair  
Keir A. Whitson, Vice Chair  
Van C. Carney  
Ronald L. Frazier  
Christine Smith

County Administrator  
Garrey W. Curry, Jr., P.E.

Asst. County Administrator  
Bonnie L. Jewell

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Board of Supervisors  
Broadband Authority

**From:** Garrey W. Curry, Jr., P.E., County Administrator

**Date:** October 30, 2023

**Re:** Regional VATI Fiber to the Home Project Update

The recent communication between APB and REC provided a good background to seek additional information from our project partners. I scheduled one-on-one meetings with both APB and REC to better understand the status of the regional VATI fiber to the home project. These meetings were followed by a regularly scheduled quarterly meeting attended by APB, the three electric utility partners, and representatives from each locality. Together, the meetings were very helpful to put the overall project into context.

**Project Schedule**

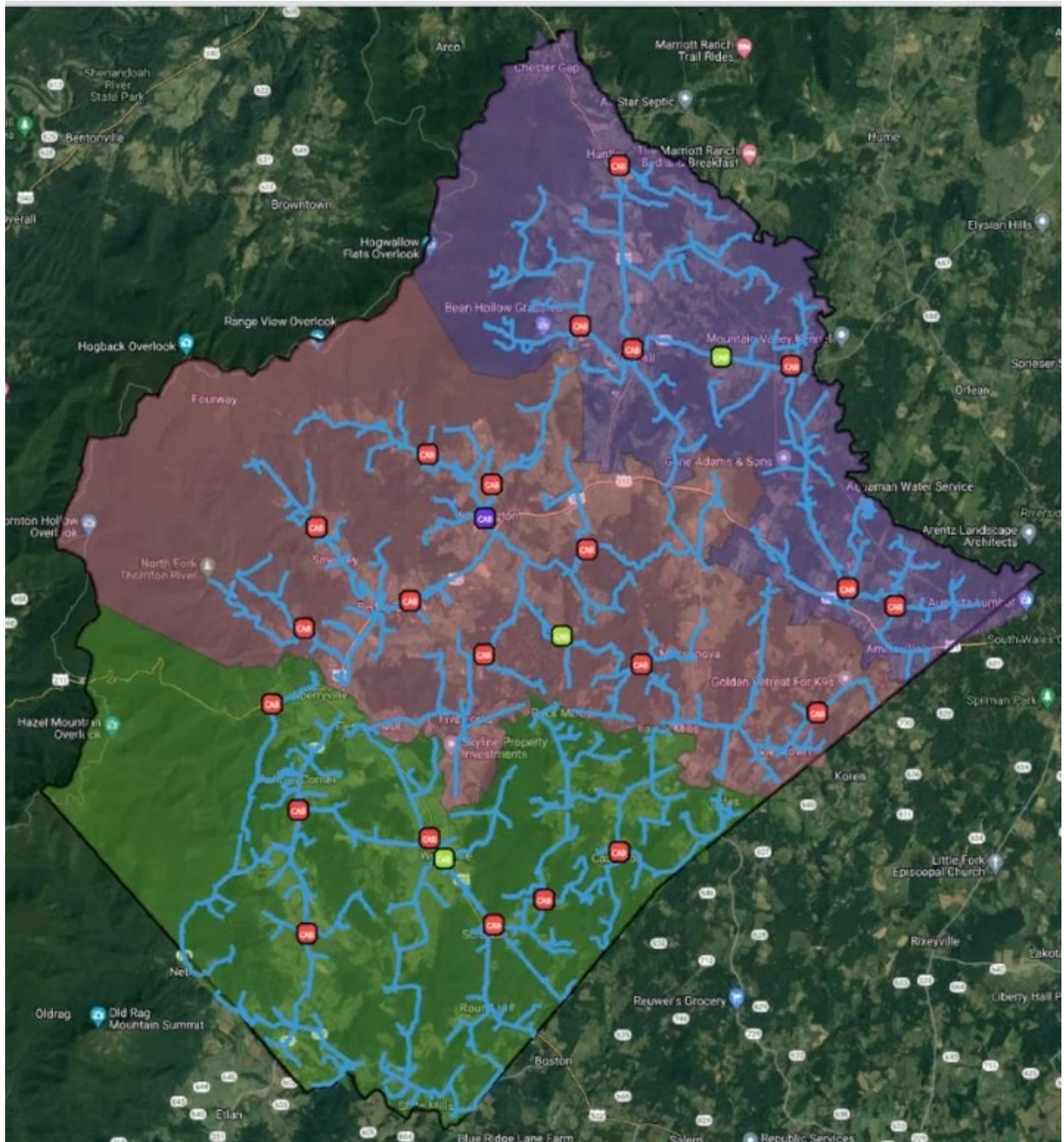
I can understand the concern expressed by many about the project schedule because there has not been construction work visible in the field. In general, I agree that the project must move swiftly to hit the ultimate end of project deadline, but have found that it was always the plan for the start of the project to consist largely of design efforts. The agreement between NSVRC and APB states:

*8. Milestones. APB agrees to meet the milestones for VATI Project deliverables in accord with the requirements of the DHCD Agreement.*

The [NSVRC-DHCD Agreement](#) sets the start of the 36-month grant period as being July 22, 2022 and thus the deadline as July 22, 2025. The three-year project schedule timeline is laid out in this agreement and the front end of the schedule is loaded with work other than actual fieldwork (see page 16). Also, fieldwork will be conducted across the region and not necessarily in all localities at all times. APB shared during recent quarterly project updates that they have changed the overall schedule to bundle utility make-ready work into larger bundles before releasing the bundles for construction to allow utility partners and their contractors to have enough work to be effective/efficient. This compression of the construction period has delayed fieldwork from that included in the initial schedule, but is envisioned to allow more contract crews to work concurrently, which we are told is a request from the contractors. When I met with REC, I was informed that they and their contract partners are ready to receive bundles of make-ready work.

### Preliminary System Design

The preliminary design ride out (PDRO) is complete in Rappahannock County. This means that the “paper” design has had a general visual inspection of the various utility paths in the field. The preliminary design is shown in the image below. The blue lines indicate fiber routes to be installed by APB and its partners. The map shows the county and fiber network broken into three shaded colors representing three planned “fiber service areas” (FSAs). Within those FSAs there will be a series of ground mounted or pole mounted cabinets indicated by the small colored squares. When reviewing, recall that the fiber is planned to follow utility corridors that do not necessarily follow roads.



### **Remaining Project Steps**

The following general steps are planned:

- Detailed pole inspection (APB and its contractors). This step is underway in other areas of the regional grant footprint.
- Pole make-ready design (APB and its contractors)
- Make-ready construction (REC and its contractors). This phase will commence in Rappahannock County when there is an adequate backlog of pole work ready for the effective use of contractors (utility relocation on a pole, utility pole equipment upgrades, or pole replacement)
- Middle mile fiber stringing where needed (REC and its partners). REC has completed all of their planned fiber installation in Rappahannock County (tying their substations and offices together). APB has not finalized which if any portions of the REC network they will use/lease. This topic was discussed in recent REC/APB correspondence.
- Fiber network stringing (APB and its partners). As shown, even without any REC fiber, the network is contiguous. This preliminary plan very well might change.
- When FSAs are ready, the customer drops will be installed (APB and its partners). Once the system is ready to support customers, they will be alerted approximately 90 days in advance. Registering interest on [APBFiber.com](http://APBFiber.com) will assure that APB has customers' preferred contact information. It is this milestone that starts the clock on the 12-month affordable drop cost guaranteed by the agreement:

*6. Without limitation, for 12 months after service becomes available **at a particular location**, APB shall offer a standard installation to the location requesting such service for \$199.00 regardless of service drop length. This flat fee shall be available to any property owner of a serviceable unit **who requests installation** within the 12-month timeframe, regardless of when installation actually occurs. Property owners will be notified that they are eligible for installation by APB through APB's advertisements, as represented in the VATI Application.*

### **Locations Outside of the VATI Project Area**

APB previously informed county representatives that they would work on a second grant funded project to obtain funding for structures that will remain unserved/underserved after the VATI project due to their location being close to the incumbent cable provider service area, but outside of the VATI area. It turns out this two-cycle process might be a good thing because the definition of underserved in the VATI project was anything less than 25/3 (Mbps down/up) and the new definition for the BEAD (Broadband Equity Access and Deployment) project is less than 100/20 (Mbps down/up). The increased standard will make sure existing/non-fiber to the home users have access to 100/20 service either through their incumbent or via the fiber to the home project. During the quarterly meeting held last week, APB representatives shared specifics about the BEAD process. First, they reiterated that there would be no additional local match for the BEAD funding request. The map below shows all potentially BEAD eligible structures located in the county (those that are tagged as being unserved/underserved and not in the VATI project area). Unlike the VATI project that relied on challenges on the backend after grant awards were released, for the BEAD process incumbent broadband providers will have the ability to "challenge" the served status of these locations prior to BEAD applications being submitted. It is expected that the incumbent cable provider will (and should) make such a challenge to remove locations they serve.

The remainder of the locations that the incumbent cannot successfully challenge will be included in the APB application with the goal of the funding being received in time to allow fiber to be installed to the BEAD structures at the same time fiber is installed to the VATI structures. The BEAD program uses zip code tabulation areas (ZCTAs) to define distinct application areas and the different dot colors on the map are intended indicate the different ZCTAs. The location of the dots/structures reflects the staff developed map indicating our understanding of unserved/underserved structures (post VATI) that was shared with APB.

