

Summary of Rural Internet Meeting: Session 2

Hosted by Schley Grange, October 10th, 2017

On October 10th, Schley Grange hosted the second meeting on rural internet. This followed an initial community meeting in August and a meeting at the legislature. Special thanks to NC Grange leader Jimmy Gentry, Representative Graig Meyer, Orange County IT Director Jim Northrup, NC Broadband Director Glenn Knox, and Schley Grange for their work in helping to advance this important topic.

At the October 10th meeting, leaders from Century Link, Spectrum and ATT spoke with the community about their plans. Rep Meyer arranged their participation. All the vendors indicated that they have no information about a change in plan or direction. They all indicated that they are adding fiber in new developments but are leary of the costs to retrofit fiber to existing residents. Many of the examples cited were town/city based and relevant for more dense areas, further indicating lack of attention to rural internet.

Each vendor indicated a willingness to meet with communities to discuss specific plans.

- AT&T has no plan to expand their DSL service area.
- Spectrum will only expand their service area if their customers pay for it on a case by case, development by development basis.
- CenturyLink has already made improvements to their network using Connect America Funds (CAF) and will finish that work by 2020. The bulk of their CAF work has been completed.

Vendor contacts are provided at the end of this summary.

Leaders from Piedmont Electric Membership Corporation (PEMC) attended both meetings and announced that they have added 166 miles of fiber around their six-county service area, connecting their substations and offices. They are working with landowners to secure easements to install fiber and are exploring ways that they can sell and/or lease “dark fiber” (excess capacity) to third parties help bring high speed internet to rural areas. PEMC distributed a map showing the route for their fiber install (provided at the end of this report).

Summary of Work to Date

- High speed broadband is defined by the FCC as 25 mbps. Most rural residents are experiencing 1.5 mbps unless they live close to a switch. Lack of service impacts children doing homework, home businesses and other essentials in a world that's growing around technology. Lack of internet is impacting home values as more and more people are unwilling to buy a home that doesn't have good internet service.
- Telemedicine leaders are joining the conversation because lack of internet service prevents rural residents from benefiting from home-based telemedicine services.
- Rural areas struggle partly because – unlike phone and electricity – internet is not regulated, and its difficult to attract investors to rural areas since they can make a lot more money serving dense and growing urban areas where speeds of 100 mbps and above are typical.
- Legislation has been slow, partly due to the strong industry lobby that funds many political campaigns.
- There are federal, state and local grants that can help but there are problems:
 - For federal government grants, Orange is not classified as a rural county. That needs to be corrected.
 - Data about service speeds is not reliable. If Orange County information is not updated, grants are unlikely to come our way.
- Technology is changing rapidly – and advances in wireless, satellite and other service could change everything. Locally organizations such as Open Broadband <http://openbb.net/> who are offering innovative approaches to bring affordable, high speed broadband to rural North Carolina.
- At the state level, legislation called the Bright Futures Act is the first step toward helping rural areas. The legislation opens the door to public private partnerships, however municipalities are not permitted to become internet service providers unless they create taxable business entities. This initial legislation references state grants but does not identify funding mechanisms to advance rural internet. Bright Futures

has passed the NC House and is in front of the Senate. If it passes, Orange County will be eligible for grants and funding if/as it becomes available.

- At an individual vendor level. Century Link indicated that they plan to build on their bonded copper wire infrastructure which under ideal circumstances can provide speeds of 80-100 mbps. However service quickly degrades as homes get further away from their switches. ATT indicated that they will continue to support DSL in rural areas. Spectrum is willing to continue to work with communities who want to invest in infrastructure. All the vendors provided contacts and welcome outreach from the community. (contact information provided below)

Next Steps

Schley Grange will continue to work with the community along with NC Grange, Rep Meyer, Senator Foushee, PEMC, Orange County, and the NC Legislature to pass Bright Futures in the Senate, and to help identify funding and service alternatives.

Community members are asked to verify that they have completed the NC Broadband survey <http://ncbroadband.gov/map> to assure that legislators and others are aware of the actual internet service speeds in rural areas.

Submitted by Bonnie Hauser, October 18th 2017

Attachments:

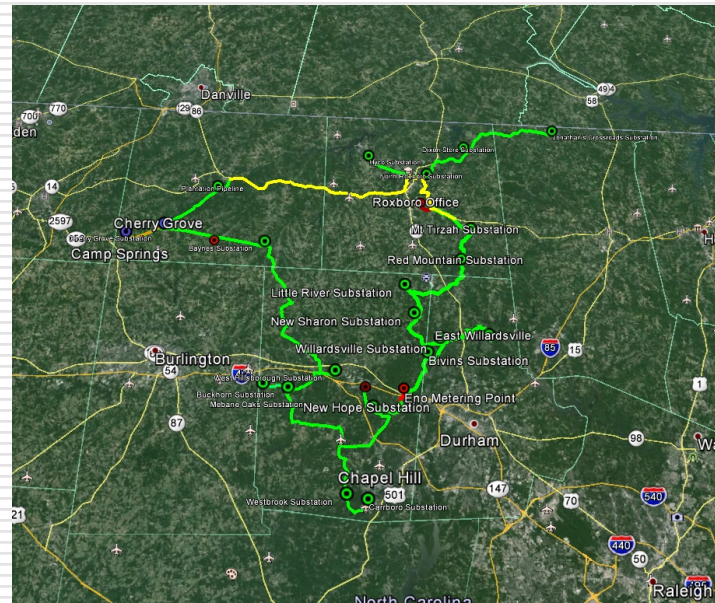
- ***Internet Service Provider Contact Information (page 4)***
- ***PEMC Map of Planned Fiber Installation (page 5)***

Internet Service Provider Contact Information

Provider	Contact Name	Title	Office Number	Mobile Number	Contact Email	Contact Address
AT&T	Robert Doreauk	Regional Director – External Affairs	919-835-1325	919-389-5120	Rd5264@att.com	150 Fayetteville St., Suite 800, Raleigh, NC 27601
AT&T	Trey Rabon	Executive Director of Governmental Affairs	919-835-1448	731-935-9099	ar1334@att.com	
CenturyLink	Derek Kelly	State & Local Government and Legislative Affairs Manager	919-554-7720	910-973-4550	derek.t.kelly@centurylink.com	150 Fayetteville Street, Suite 970, Raleigh, NC 27601
CenturyLink	Steve Brewer	State Government Affairs	919-554-7239	919-696-5700	steven.k.brewer@centurylink.com	150 Fayetteville Street, Suite 970, Raleigh, NC 27601
Charter/ Spectrum	Mia Bailey	Director, Government Affairs	919-882-4741	984-459-0162	mia.bailey@charter.com	19 W. Hargett Street, Ste. 805, Raleigh, NC 27601

Piedmont Electric Membership Cooperative Map of Planned Fiber Installation

Broadband Project



- MCNC Existing
- PEMC Build