

Media Release

Caroline County Effort to Bring Broad Band to Community

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Alan Partin, Interim County Administrator

Ladysmith, Virginia--

On February 7th Supervisor Wayne Acors of the Madison District held a meeting with residential community leaders and executives of Comcast to make the case for extending broad band to the growing Caroline western neighborhoods.

Based on statements made by Mr. Tom Coughlin an executive with Comcast attending the meeting at the Caroline Visitor Center, Comcast will decide whether or not Caroline will receive additional broad band investment by the 21st of March.

The Comcast meeting was a major breakthrough for the County as many past attempts to engage Comcast had been ignored or rebuffed. Mr. Coughlin had newly assumed his post managing the mid-Atlantic region when the County called. The timing of the contact, and Mr. Coughlin's willingness to engage the community in a dialogue has produced a more encouraging environment for a broad band investment.

The Comcast initiative was but one of countless attempts to bring broad band to Caroline over the last several years. Efforts involved a County Technology Committee, the creation of a Technology Ordinance to facilitate investment, and multiple contacts with the highest reaches of national government and the communication industry in effort to convince the leading industries to complete their broad band networks and serve Caroline's citizens.

County Supervisors have repeatedly traveled to Capitol Hill to enlist the aid of the Virginia delegation to press Verizon and Comcast to invest in Caroline. The Federal Communication Commission, and the Virginia State Corporation Commission were approached to lever corporate cooperation. No governmental entity was able to move the communication companies to provide service.

Federal grant programs were examined to seek some sort of funding to start a local system or to lever other investment, but the programs are not designed for a community like Caroline that has *some* broad band and is not sufficiently rural. The County did participate in a regional broad band stimulus grant, but that grant was not funded.

The County has consistently worked with local entrepreneurs to assist in their plans for providing broad band service and continues to do so.

The County has also worked with several independent broad band providers to explore their potential to provide the needed service. Unfortunately, some independent companies have not lived up to their initial claims of ability to perform, while others can perform, but require large capital outlays up front to install a system.

The County is still working with independent firms and hopes to have a meeting with one in March. When the meeting is confirmed, the stakeholders from the residential communities will be invited to attend to enter into the discussions with the broad band provider.

Caroline County is in the same frustrating situation as many rural communities in America: within feet of broad band service, but unable to convince providers to look beyond their business models and profit expectations in order to provide service for its citizens.

There is still reason to hope for broad band service to come to Caroline in the near future. As the economy is beginning to gain momentum, investors remember that Caroline was a dynamic growth community before the recession. With a strong post recession market potential in Caroline, and Comcast's new engagement in the County, the equation needed for investment may be shifting in Caroline's favor.

County government will do more than hope for future investment, it will never stop working for broad band for its citizens.

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