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Craven County Board of Commissioners to Issue Letters of Support Regarding County Match for Three NC Broadband GREAT Grant Applications

NEW BERN, N.C. – The Craven County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to issue letters of support for three North Carolina Broadband Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant applications. The decision was made at a special called meeting on Monday, March 28, 2022, to issue letters of support and potential grant matches up to a maximum of \$900,000 total for all three projects. The GREAT Grant program focuses on increasing broadband access to Craven County households in census blocks deemed to be underserved by internet with broadband speeds of less than 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload as determined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) Division of Broadband and Digital Equity.

Jason R. Jones, Chairman of the Craven County Board of Commissioners said, "This is a great opportunity for Craven County, now that we have partners interested in bringing high-speed internet to the rural areas of our county. The Craven County Commissioners have long considered access to broadband internet a top priority and a necessity for the quality of life of our citizens."

The GREAT Grant is a State of North Carolina grant program funded with federal dollars for private sector broadband providers to facilitate the deployment of broadband service to areas of the state unserved with broadband. This is a competitive grant program with a funding cap of \$4 million for each grant project and a maximum of two proposals may be granted for each county. There are no guarantees any of the proposals will be funded or at what level due to the expected statewide interest in the GREAT Grant program.

The goal of GREAT Grant projects is to increase the number of households and businesses with access to high-speed broadband internet. It is important for citizens and business owners to understand Craven County cannot guarantee what the quality of internet service will be once it reaches homes, however GREAT Grant criteria requires project deployments must provide minimum speeds of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload, scalable to 100 Mbps symmetrical.

The Craven County Board of Commissioners voted to issue letters of support for the following grant proposals:

1. Suddenlink/Altice proposal designed to expand their existing network to reach approximately 753 additional homes and businesses for a total project cost of \$4,515,509 with a requested match from Craven County in the amount of \$250,000.

2. CenturyLink/Lumen/BrightSpeed proposal designed to develop broadband that will either provide new access or improved access to 5,500 homes and businesses for a total project cost of \$9.2 million with a requested match from Craven County in the amount of \$500,000.
3. Charter/Spectrum proposal designed to expand their existing network to reach approximately 1,255 additional homes and businesses for a total project cost of \$6,015,088 with a requested match from Craven County in the amount of \$150,000.

Matching funds are required for each grant project awarded and must come from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds issued to Craven County. Craven County has identified ARPA funds available to meet the match requirements should the grant proposals receive funding.

A review of the Craven County High School Attendance Districts showed 7.74% of households in the Havelock High School Attendance District are without reliable internet, 12.30% of households in the New Bern High School Attendance District are without reliable internet, and 54.41% of households in the West Craven High School Attendance District as shown on the NC OneMap and defined by the FCC and the State of North Carolina.

For more information on the GREAT Grant program, visit: <https://www.ncbroadband.gov/grants/great-grant-federal>.

To view the NC OneMap, visit:

<https://nconemap.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=72f01e944bde425ca07523d06a59c232>

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