

# Grant could bring broadband to Madison

Gracie Hart Brooks Dec 20, 2018

A grant proposal has been submitted that, if funded, could bring broadband to Madison County.

In late October, Madison County resident and Madison Gigabit owner Clint Hyde presented a proposal to the Madison County Board of Supervisors to apply for a grant from the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). If awarded, the grant would be used to fund a broadband project in Madison County.

The basic concept of the project, which was developed by Hyde, is to create or expand a ground station in town which would then beam to a tower, possibly Blakey, and then to end-points in other areas of Madison such as Wolftown, Rochelle, Brightwood, and Criglersville. The end points in the areas would be poles or towers, depending on the height that's needed. Each end point has the possibility to provide service to as many as 125 residences each. End point service speeds are expected to reach 100 megabits in both directions.

The antennas are approximately \$6,000 each including one at the ground station, the tower and then the end points, plus the cost to install them (approximately \$4,000) and the pole (\$8,000) or tower (\$17,000) at each end point.

The grant requires a public-private partnership. The requested amount of the grant is \$75,000 with Madison Gigabit putting up \$56,000 as the private partner. The county would then provide additional funding, currently estimated at \$12,000, with a large portion of it being in-kind through the use

of existing structures.

Supervisors were very receptive to Hyde's proposal.

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"It's interesting and could serve a big portion of Madison County," board of supervisors chairman Clay Jackson said.

"According to other counties, we're way of ahead of the game [with this proposal]," supervisor Amber Foster said.

The supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution in support of the project. The grant proposal was submitted last week. Award notices are expected to be released in February. If approved, Hyde said install could begin in late spring or early summer.

Meanwhile, the governor's proposed budget includes an increase in funding for VATI. The currently \$4 million already appropriated annually could be increased to \$50 million in fiscal year 2020. The state funding would be matched by local, federal and private funds. The funding is envisioned as the first installments of a multi-year investment totaling \$250 million.