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HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Harford County Announces Partnership to Bring Broadband to Rural North; Agreement Signed with Internet Service Provider ThinkBig Networks

BEL AIR, Md., (March 3, 2021) - Harford County has entered into a partnership with ThinkBig Networks, a private sector internet service provider, to bring broadband service to the county's rural northern region over the next several years. The exact timing will depend on infrastructure construction and grant funding, which both parties are aggressively pursuing.

This public/private partnership is the result of strategic planning by the Glassman administration to bring reliable, high-speed internet service to the most unserved and underserved areas of the county.

Approximately 2,500 homes in northern Harford County have no internet service at all. Thousands more rely on technologies that fall short of broadband. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has made internet service even more crucial for distance learning, teleworking and telemedicine.

Under the agreement, Harford County's contribution is the use of its Harford Metro Area Network (HMAN), a fiber optic network that provides broadband access to county agencies, schools, libraries, recreation centers, and public safety sites. CARES Act funding is being used to pay for an expansion of HMAN, which is underway.

Harford County will allow ThinkBig to connect to, and build off of, HMAN's unused fiber capacity to more quickly and expansively reach homes and businesses that choose their service. The agreement obligates ThinkBig to charge customers reasonable market rates, comparable to rates available to customers in more densely populated areas of Harford County.

ThinkBig was selected by Harford County from among the respondents to its Request for Information in June 2020. ThinkBig is based in Chestertown, Maryland, and has a successful presence in Kent and Charles counties, excellent performance reviews, and it pledges to invest.

Phase 1 of this multi-year project for northern Harford County will begin in the northwest, where the greatest number of homes and businesses are unserved. Subsequent phases will be based, in part, on community interest.

“My constituents in northern Harford County are in need of high speed internet and I couldn’t be more excited to see this project move forward,” District D County Councilman Chad Shrodes said. “I encourage everyone to register their interest with ThinkBig, and I thank County Executive Glassman for his persistence in finding a solution.”

A map of the project area, interest registration forms and more information are posted on ThinkBig Networks’ website at <http://www.thinkbignets.com/about-thinkbig-harford-county>.

“Expanding our HMAN leverages an asset that the county has already invested in, and brings us closer to the day when rural businesses and families can have equal access to reliable, high speed internet,” County Executive Barry Glassman said. “This innovative agreement advances a major goal of my administration, and I would like to thank my chief advisor, Billy Boniface, and his project team members, Christen Sullivan and Nick Kuba, for making it happen.”

Background on Harford County’s strategic planning for rural broadband and a copy of the agreement with ThinkBig are posted on the county website at <https://www.harfordcountymd.gov/1621/Rural-Broadband>.



County officials observing work on the HMAN expansion that will allow ThinkBig Networks to connect to and construct their broadband service to the unserved and underserved customers in northern Harford County.

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