



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
ALBEMARLE COUNTY
BROADBAND AUTHORITY

RFI# 2020-04163-92

I. PURPOSE

The Albemarle Broadband Authority (“ABBA”) is requesting information from qualified private internet service providers (“ISPs”) to provide input, ideas, and recommendation to support the procurement and implementation of a program to expand or construct, deploy, maintain, own and operate a “fee-for-service” broadband network to provide Internet Service to subsets of the approximately 3,700 unserved and underserved homes and businesses throughout Albemarle County (the County). ABBA’s intent, if any subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) is produced as a result of feedback from this Request for Information (RFI), is to subsidize one or more Internet Service Provider (ISP)s’ deployment of Internet Service to serve those populations, to ensure that internet connectivity is available for residents and visitors, to facilitate economic growth, education, healthcare, and public safety.

II. BACKGROUND

The Albemarle Broad Authority (ABBA) was formed by the Board of Supervisors in August of 2017. The goal of ABBA is to extend affordable broadband internet service access to every customer in Albemarle County. Albemarle County, located in Central Virginia, comprises approximately 726 square miles and has approximately 108,000 residents. Albemarle County Local Government and Albemarle County Public Schools actively employ approximately 4,000 full time and part-time personnel providing a broad range of services to businesses and residents. The local government under the Code of Virginia is governed by a Board of Supervisors, which is elected by the qualified voters. The Board of Supervisors of Albemarle County is composed of six members, one from each magisterial district, which oversees the efforts of the local government staff headed by the Office of the County Executive.

III. REQUESTED INFORMATION:

ABBA wants to ensure that internet connectivity is available for residents and visitors, to facilitate economic growth, education, healthcare and public safety, while acknowledging their leadership role in expanding access and improving utilization. In an effort to provide Internet Service to unserved and underserved areas throughout the County, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors and ABBA are exploring methods to provide Internet access for residents who lack access to broadband at the FCC-defined speed of 25 Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. The County recognizes the challenges of deploying broadband in rural areas and should any RFP be produced as a result of feedback from this RFI, the County would like to explore the feasibility of subsidizing one or more ISP’s deployment of Internet service to the underserved and unserved areas. This RFI seeks to obtain information for the requirements for services related to a Broadband Public/Private Partnership.

A potential RFP would be based on the following assumptions:

1. ABBA retains decision authority over the selection of one or more private ISPs and the location of any new infrastructure to support the deployment of or expansion of a broadband network in Albemarle County.
2. ABBA will not own or operate the network. ABBA’s role is intended to facilitate the creation

of the network and to ensure that awarded projects meet deadlines and agreed-upon broadband speeds and quality levels.

3. ABBA is seeking methods both common and unique to extend existing service areas or create new services. Ideas such as going beyond the status quo service model and offering internet service to new customers not on a current providers' "radar"; extending new wireless service through approved construction of infrastructure; leveraging ABBA funds as release contingent on award from federal and state grants; ISPs teaming for access to the funds; ideas accelerating plans to deploy service such that the essential service of broadband is available to all Albemarle residents.
4. Should any RFP result from this RFI, it would be anticipated that a leveraged match, based on ABBA's proposed spending of approximately \$800,000 on one or more projects, based on one, or a combination of the following options:
 - a. Leveraged funds direct to a project;
 - b. Leveraged funds in assistance to an application for [ReConnect](#) funds;
 - c. Leveraged funds in assistance to an application for [Rural Digital Opportunity](#) funds;
 - d. Leveraged funds in assistance to an application for [Virginia Telecommunication Initiative \(VATI\)](#) funds.
5. Respondents may recommend an approach using only one of the options or a combination of any number of them.
6. This information phase is intended to assess the selected ISPs' capabilities, current service offerings and pricing plans, financials, and buildout capacity of the proposed broadband network expansion.
7. If ABBA decides to move forward with an RFP, that process will include negotiations to refine the detailed deployment plan based on available funding (private and public) and funding opportunities. If a contract results from the RFP, the project would move to the Deployment Phase.

IV. DESIRED OUTCOME:

A. Overview of Scope of Service provided by ISP

The ISP is to provide, at a minimum, the following services:

1. A seamless and reliable broadband access that does not impose less than 500 GB monthly caps on a user's total upload and download data capacity or restrict usage when a cap of less than 500 GB monthly usage is reached.
2. Research and prepare all necessary FCC related forms and submittals required to provide services.
3. Procurement of any permits required for the distribution of Internet content or FCC licensing.
4. Design, implement, operate and maintain the broadband network.
5. Provide a household-level coverage map showing predicted coverage and number of households estimated to be served.
6. Provide marketing, sales, customer billing and account billing and collections.
7. Perform a post-construction verification of connection coverage, speed, and quality.

B. Overview of Scope of Services/Assets provided by County

The County and ABBA plan the following actions to facilitate in the deployment of a solution:

1. A portion of funding for procurement and construction of infrastructure.
2. Support and assistance in permitting and navigation of other County processes.
3. Support in negotiating access to bandwidth and/or vertical assets of existing infrastructure.
4. Where possible, access to County facilities for mounting wireless infrastructure and hosting equipment.
5. Promotion of digital literacy training to increase adoption rates.
6. Public meetings within each magisterial district to solicit committed demand, awareness and education of the broadband expansion initiative and offered services.
7. Assistance in any Grant activities as needed.

C. ABBA Broadband

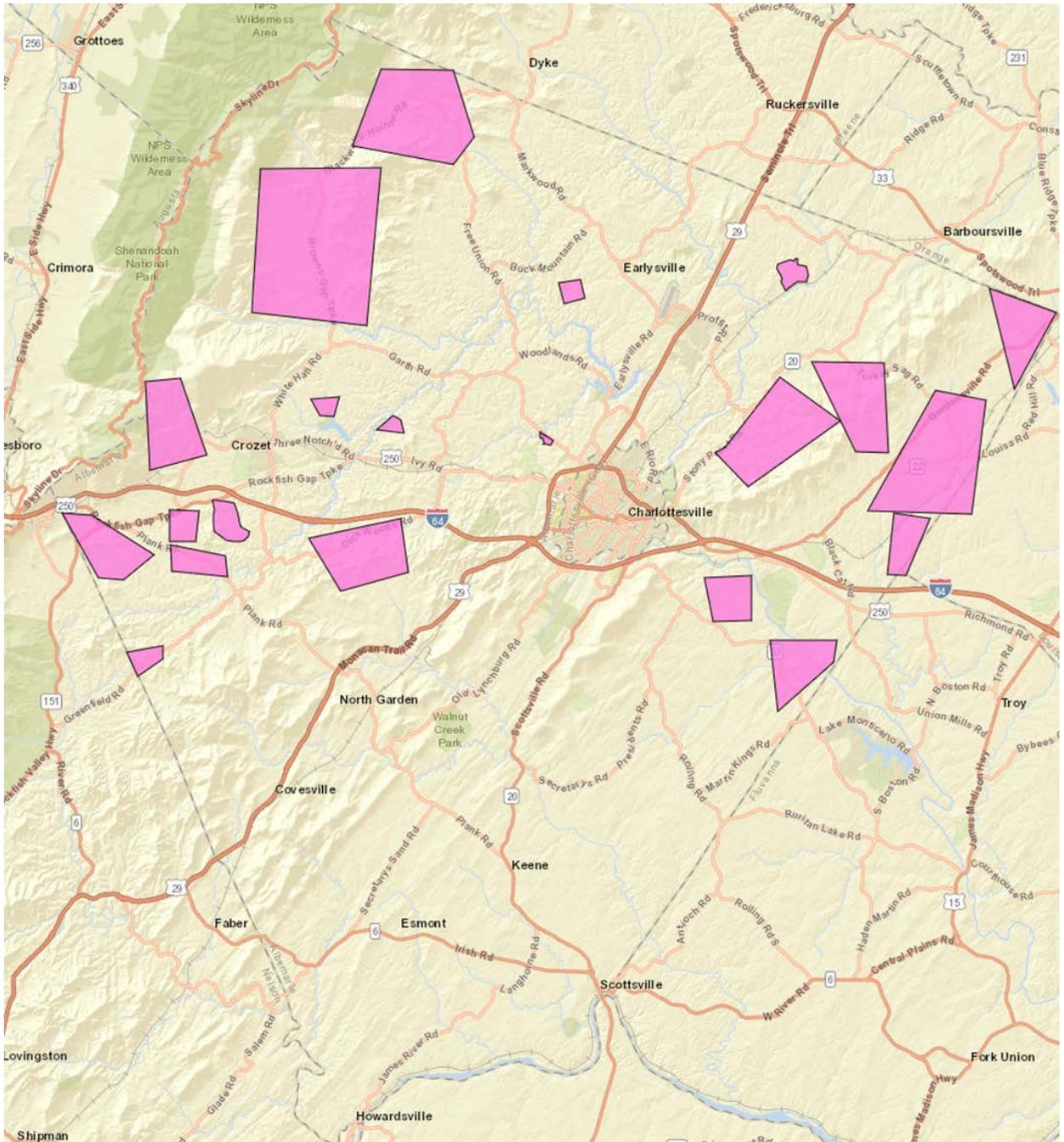
ABBA and Albemarle County continue to demonstrate success through partnership with ISPs. Many partnership projects in the Southern area of the County have increased or are increasing citizen access to broadband. In the process of the partnerships, several other areas of Albemarle County unfortunately have not been included in the success.

ABBA understands the challenge of deploying broadband networks in rural areas that are sparsely populated with mountainous terrain and is prepared to assist financially as budgeting allows. ABBA desires a partner committed to providing service that meets future demand, leveraging whatever technology is economical feasible. ABBA anticipates growth in demand as applications advance and adoption increases.

D. Current Broadband Areas of Need

ABBA relaunched the Community Broadband Survey in February 2020, <https://www.albemarle.org/broadbandreport>. The findings of the survey have identified areas within the County where services are reported as less than or equal to 10 Mbps download, 1 Mbps upload. These areas are considered unserved, and likely eligible for funding opportunities.

Service areas beyond those on this map may be also be considered. The proposed service area must be fully described by the ISP as unserved or underserved and documented by ISP supplied data.



This map is for demonstration purposes only and not to scale. Example project areas are included in pink shaded polygons. ISPs are encouraged to combine areas and submit new areas as warranted.

Note that there are no areas in the Southern section of Albemarle; this is due to the work CenturyLink and CVEC are completing to serve multiple large unserved areas. The CenturyLink projects are beginning to be scheduled with expected delivery of March 2021. The CVEC projects have various delivery dates. Details of each section are included in the sample RFP as Exhibit 1B Project Maps. The full ESRI map is available: <https://arcg.is/1fS0zq0>

V. RFI SUBMISSIONS:

The Division requests that interested ISPs with expertise in the areas outlined in this RFI submit information regarding creative ideas, recommended approaches, strategies, advice and the like. The Division seeks input in any form deemed appropriate by the respondent, including but not limited to white papers, lessons learned, etc.

Please include in your response, the following:

1. Does the definition of seamless reliable broadband access coincide with the ISPs vision?
2. Should there be additional services listed?
3. Should the ABBA Scope of Services/Assets be adjusted in any way?
4. Does the ISP agree with the intent of the RFP, Attachment B Sample RFP, including the phased approach to award?

VI. TIMELINE:

Responses to this **RFI are due by Thursday, April 16, 2020 at 3:00pm**. An electronic copy of the proposal, in either Microsoft Word or PDF, is required. Responses and all communications regarding this RFI should be submitted to:

Sharon Cash, Buyer II
Albemarle County Purchasing Office
401 McIntire Road, Room 248
Charlottesville, VA 22902
Scash2@albemarle.org

The County will hold two virtual interactive meetings, to review the structure of a potential RFP, and to review the proposed project areas, and to answer questions.

- Thursday April 9, 2020 from 3pm-4pm
- Tuesday April 14, 2020 from 3pm-4pm.

Interest in attending either of the meetings should be emailed to Scash2@albemarle.org and mculp@albemarle.org. Include the date of the meeting to be attended, and the email(s) to be invited to the virtual meeting. An electronic invite will subsequently be sent with the conference information/link.

VII. QUESTIONS:

Questions with regard to this RFI can be sent to the attention of: Sharon Cash: scash2@albemarle.org, or at 434-296-5854 x 3135, Option 1.

VIII. DISCLAIMER:

Please be advised that this is a request for information only. This RFI is issued solely for information and planning purposes – it does not constitute a request for proposal or a promise to issue an RFP in the future.

In the event that sufficient information is received, the Division may, but is not required to, issue a competitive solicitation. This RFI is not a competitive solicitation and no contract award shall

result. This RFI will not be used to evaluate, rank or select ISPs, nor will it be used to pre-qualify or screen ISPs for a subsequent competitive solicitation process, if any. If a subsequent competitive solicitation is issued, the Division is under no obligation to advise any ISP responding to this RFI. ISPs are advised to monitor the Division's website for any such opportunities, which will be open to all ISPs regardless of whether or not a response to this RFI has been submitted.

The Division will not pay for the preparation of any information submitted or for use of that information. The Division reserves the right to utilize any information submitted in its best interest without any obligation, liability, or consideration on the part of the Division.

Ownership of all data, materials and documentation originated and prepared for the Division pursuant to this RFI shall belong exclusively to the Division and be subject to public inspection in accordance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. Trade secrets or proprietary information submitted by an ISP shall not be publicly disclosed under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; however, the ISP shall invoke the protection of this section prior to or upon submission of the data or other materials and must identify the data or other materials to be protected and state the reasons why protection is necessary. Disposition of the proprietary materials after the RFIs are reviewed should be stated by the ISP. ISPs should indicate on Attachment A - Proprietary/Confidential Information Identification, the portions of their response that are proprietary and return Attachment A with their submission. Please list the page number(s) and reason(s) on the form.

This RFI does not commit the Division of Albemarle, Virginia (the "County") to contract for any supply or service whatsoever. Furthermore, the Division is not at this time seeking proposals and will not accept unsolicited proposals. Parties responding are advised that the Division will not pay for any information or administrative costs incurred in response to this RFI; all costs associated with responding to this RFI will be solely at the interested party's expense. Not responding to this RFI does not preclude participation in any future RFP, if any is issued. Any materials submitted in response to this RFI shall be the sole property of the Division of Albemarle.

