

April 5, 2021

To Saline Township residents

Subject: Recent activities of the Washtenaw County BroadBand Task Force (BBTF)

Greetings Saline Township Residents, Gary Pirkola here.

I'm the (very recently appointed – January 2021) Saline Township representative on the Washtenaw County BroadBand (High Speed Internet) Task Force (the BBTF). I wanted to give an update on the recent activities of the BBTF that might be of interest to Saline Township residents.

First some context, the BBTF (or some variation of the same) has been in existence since July 2017, and states as its basic mission that it is:

“A task force convened by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners to explore countywide broadband equity via collaboration with local townships, and to explore grant opportunities that would result in countywide broadband equity”

A bit of recent history concerning the BBTF. In January of 2020 the BBTF initiated/commissioned a county wide Survey to determine the extent of the underserved and unserved areas of Washtenaw County. Underserved areas are defined as those with internet service less the 25 Mbps (Megabits per second) download and 3 Mbps upload. Unserved areas have no internet service. At that time, it was determined that of the 1400 “active parcels” in Saline Township, approximately 450 were underserved or unserved (i.e. close to 1/3). Additionally, in June of 2020 the BBTF initiated/commissioned a county wide Pre-Engineering Study to ascertain preliminary physical infrastructure requirements and estimated costs. These two steps were critical in order to be able to apply for grant funding.

Very recently (February 2021) the BBTF has been informed that as a result of their grant application efforts, Washtenaw County has been awarded a sizeable federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) grant to “build out” a fiber optic infrastructure to serve a large segment of the underserved and unserved areas of Washtenaw county. In particular, the grant will (eventually) provide high speed internet access to close to 350 of the 450 underserved or unserved “active parcels” in Saline Township (i.e. over 75%). This is very good news for Saline Township residents.

The BBTF has published a “one-pager” document announcing this RDOF award and detailing what it means for Washtenaw County. I have included this “one-pager” below.

But before getting too far ahead of this very good news for Saline Township, a few cautionary notes are in order. The grant specifies that the company selected for implementation of broadband service in Saline Township, specifically Midwest Energy and Communications (MEC), will have 6 years to complete their “build out” of the fiber optic infrastructure. Further, there are still a number of Saline Township residents (close to 100) that will not be served by the RDOF grant.

The included BBTF “one-pager” below contains an FCC link, that allows Saline Township residents to type in their address and determine if their location will be served by the RDOF grant (key: green means an address served by RDOF).

The BBTF “one-pager” also has other useful information, specifically:

A link to an MEC web site where Saline Township residents can “express a desire” to sign up for broadband service when it becomes available. I would encourage all interested Saline Township residents to “express a desire” with their specific information on this MEC site, as this will be an indication to MEC of the interest for broadband service in Saline Township. Note that at this time, this

MEC site only allows residents to “express a desire”, not to actually signup for service (which does not currently exist in Saline Township). Ignore the fact that the questions and responses may seem like you are being asked to sign up for actual internet service in the near future.

The BBTF “one pager” also contains a link to the general Washtenaw County BBTF web site where Saline Township residents can sign up for notifications about BBTF meeting notices and updates, as well as a general FAQ link (answers to Frequently Asked Questions). I would encourage interested Saline Township residents to visit these links regularly.

Finally, I have included two additional maps below that might help identify more clearly the details of the Saline Township RDOF award areas:

The first map is a “side-by-side” map that shows on the left side, the Saline Township award area (in green) from the FCC web site link mentioned in the “BBTF one-pager”, and on the right side a version of the same (in gray) with annotated Saline Township roads included.

The second map shows again just the Saline Township award area by location/parcel/household, obtained by going to the link “BROADBAND ACCESS MAP” on the general Washtenaw County BBTF web site.

Note that the Key for this second map is as follows:

Blue - Proposed RDOF Service Area

Red - Not awarded via RDOF

White - Considered served (currently)

In closing I will say that the BBTF is well aware that not all underserved or unserved areas in Saline Township are covered by the RDOF grant award, and thus residents should be reassured to know that the BBTF is continuing to pursue other grant opportunities to accomplish its mission of “countywide broadband equity”.

Feel free to e-mail me with any additional questions you may have. With your permission, I will add your e-mail address to a “Saline Township BBTF interest group”. I am just now beginning to think about how best to inform ALL Saline Township residents of BBTF issues and activities going forward. Any suggestions for broader communication will be appreciated.

Gary Pirkola

gpirkola@gmail.com

Saline Township representative on the BBTF

***** BBTF one-pager



Washtenaw County Broadband Task Force

Working to Achieve Countywide Broadband Equity by 2022

www.washtenaw.org/broadband



RDOF Awards for Broadband Expansion What does it mean for Washtenaw County?

What is RDOF?

RDOF (Rural Digital Opportunity Fund) is a federal grant program to expand rural broadband networks by providing operational funding (not construction) over a 10-year period.

How can I find out if my address is part of the RDOF award?

<https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/maps/rdo-f-phase-i-dec-2020/>

Click on this link.

Enter your address in the search bar in the upper right hand corner of the screen.

Note the color identified in the Map Legend. It indicates the type of internet service planned for you.

How long before my township has broadband access? The two companies selected for the grant will have up to 6 years to complete their build outs. It may be 2026-2027 before the work in Washtenaw County is finished. An estimated timeline will become available later this summer (2021).

How do I express my desire to sign up for broadband when it becomes available?

- For MEC areas (Midwest Energy & Communications)
<https://www.teammidwest.com/internet/sign-up-internet/>
- For Mercury Wireless area :
[Check For Service - Mercury Broadband](#)

Where can I sign up to receive Broadband Task Force meeting notices and updates?

<https://www.washtenaw.org/2867/Broadband-Task-Force>

Click on the blue "Sign-Up for Notifications" button to the right of the page.

Is there an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) about broadband in Washtenaw County?

<https://www.washtenaw.org/2867/Broadband-Task-Force>

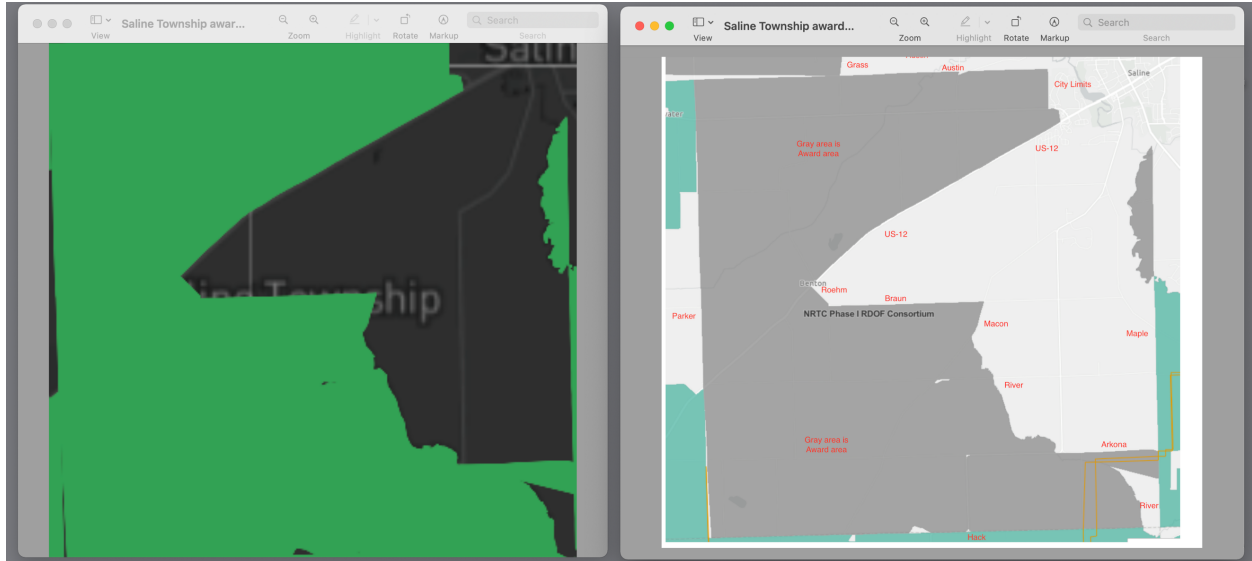
Click on the blue "FAQ's" button on the right hand side of the page.

Questions: barb@provide.net

###

X

***** Saline Township side-by-side map
***** green(left) and gray(right) areas are RDOF award areas



X

***** Saline Township BROADBAND ACCESS MAP award area
***** from BBTF general web site, key: blue=yes, red=no, white=already served)

