



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Board of Commissioners Expand Broadband Infrastructure and Address Internet Affordability, Literacy, and Access Concerns with \$15.5 Million Investment

Washtenaw County, MI – At their meeting last week, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved up to \$15,472,270 to address broadband needs countywide. The COVID-19 pandemic made the importance of having access to high-speed broadband internet extremely clear. Individuals and families need it to go to school, work remotely, connect with friends and family, and access critical services. This investment by the Board of Commissioners will expand high-speed broadband internet infrastructure to all households in the county, and will also set aside dollars to address concerns related to internet affordability, literacy, and access.

“Allocating funds to make broadband available to all Washtenaw County residents is a transformational moment for our community,” said Jason Maciejewski, County Commissioner for District 1. “Telehealth services, educational access, work-from-home and the ability to accomplish everyday tasks online will become available no matter where you live.”

A substantial portion of this investment will go to expanding broadband infrastructure to every address in Washtenaw County. Recent grants from the state and federal government have helped reduce the number of unconnected households to approximately 3,300. To close the rest of this gap, the Board authorized using up to \$4,890,757 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, \$1,000,000 from the County General Fund, and \$8,781,513 of recovered lost revenues. This \$14,672,270 investment sets Washtenaw County up to become one of the first counties in the state to fully bridge the digital divide. County staff will work closely with internet services providers over the coming years to ensure fiscal responsibility and transparency as these funds are implemented.

“Having broadband infrastructure is extremely important, but just having the infrastructure is not good enough if you can’t afford or don’t know how to use it,” said Katie Scott, County Commissioner for District 9. “Knowing that access to broadband has been deemed a public health priority, our goal as a Commission is to ensure nothing stands in the way of our residents

from being able to take advantage of high speed internet, whether it's physical infrastructure, cost, or technical know-how."

To achieve this goal, the Board allocated an additional \$800,000 to broadly address internet affordability, literacy, and access concerns. At the 9/15 meeting where this resolution was approved, several Commissioners committed to closely monitoring the usage of these funds and potentially increasing them as needed. Over the coming weeks, the county will communicate specifically how this \$800,000 investment will be targeted.

The resolution also instructed County Administration to begin exploring other funding opportunities to hopefully reimburse this initial investment in broadband, including, but not limited to a potential federal infrastructure bill. If reimbursed, this would allow ARPA funds to be reinvested for other eligible uses.

"Allocating \$15.5 million to expand broadband infrastructure and address internet affordability, literacy, and access was a big ask," said Shannon Beeman, Commissioner for District 3, "We had some difficult conversations but maintained open lines of communication, which got us to where we are today. There's still a lot of work to do, but getting this far is a huge accomplishment. It's a great feeling to know how many lives are going to be positively impacted."

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The **Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners** is comprised of nine elected officials representing different Washtenaw County communities. The current Board will serve from January 2021 through December 2022.

[Click here](#) to find the list of Commissioners by district.

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