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Talbot County and Easton Utilities Partner on Broadband Grant Application

The Talbot County Council voted Tuesday night to partner with Easton Utilities and the State of Maryland's Office of Rural Broadband to pursue a federal grant for funding to help extend high-speed internet service to areas of the county with insufficient access to broadband.

"While there are no guarantees that Easton Utilities will receive funding for this highly competitive grant, we are confident we have a strong team working to prepare a thorough, professional application," says Talbot County Council President Corey Pack. "We believe access to broadband connectivity is essential for our residents and businesses as we move toward the future."

In March 2018, Congress appropriated \$600 million for a Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect) to be administered by the United States Department of Agriculture. In a unique public/private partnership, Easton Utilities, Talbot County, and the State of Maryland are working to secure a portion of this USDA grant funding for the Talbot County Broadband Project.

Proof of financial and operational sustainability of the project is key to a successful grant application. If funding is awarded, the financial model will be comprised of investments from the USDA, Easton Utilities, the Talbot County Council, the State of Maryland, and customers.

Residents and business owners who subscribe to the new service should anticipate contributing to the initial installation costs in the form of a Contribution In Aid of Construction (CIAC) fee. This fee is expected to be at or below those from recent projects. Financing for these costs will be made available to customers.

"We are very excited about this opportunity," says Hugh E. Grunden, president and CEO of Easton Utilities. "The benefits to Talbot County will be immeasurable. These types of public/private partnerships have proven to be successful in providing access to high-speed internet."

Talbot County completed a market survey in March to assess the feasibility of extending broadband service to portions of the county with insufficient broadband access. The response rate was strong, with a complete analysis of the results forthcoming.

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Talbot County – Easton Utilities Partnership

Easton Velocity, a service of Easton Utilities, will design, construct, own, operate, and maintain the infrastructure to offer high-speed internet services to county residents and businesses with insufficient access to broadband.

The deadline for the USDA ReConnect grant program is May 31. Awards are expected to be announced by the first quarter of 2020.

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