



MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

JOHN M. BECKER

Chairman

MARK SCIMONE

County Administrator

CINDY URTZ

Clerk

138 N. Court St., PO Box 635

Wampsville, NY 13163

Phone: 315/366-2201

Fax: 315/366-2502

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Contact: Samantha Field 315-366-2822

Samantha.field@madisoncounty.ny.gov

Madison County Awarded USDA ReConnect Grant

Grant Will Bring Broadband to Over 7,500 Underserved Homes - Bring Competition

Wampsville, NY – Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) named Madison County a recipient of the ReConnect Grant and Loan Program. Madison County is one of two projects being funded this round in New York State. The grant totaling \$10.1 million will not only bring broadband service to 7,590 underserved households, farms, and businesses in the county, but will also add a major service competitor, Empire Access, to the area.

This is a major infrastructure upgrade for the Madison County community. Not only does it bring in much needed access to rural homes, but also a carrier who plans to expand to other parts of the county, becoming a competitor for service providers that are already here.

Madison County has been working on this project for over two years. For years, Madison County has lagged behind the more urban counties in the State when it comes to access to affordable, reliable broadband. This was even more apparent after the County conducted a Broadband Availability & Adoption (BAAT) Campaign in 2019 to determine needs and opportunities for broadband Internet growth in the region. The BAAT, conducted by Madison County and our partner ECC Technologies, helped map out the served and underserved areas of the county. As a result, the county decided to apply for the USDA ReConnect program to improve our community's access to broadband countywide.

The County was working on the ReConnect grant application when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. That did not stop the team. They were able to submit the application on time. If anything, COVID-19 actually brought to light how essential access to high-speed internet is for our everyday lives. People use it for work, school, health care, communication, and so much more.

The network, built with the grant money, will be leased to Empire Access who will provide the service and maintenance of the lines. The USDA ReConnect Grant is for \$10.1 million, and Madison County will be providing a 25% match to complete the project.

"I am so proud to have led such a hard working team to bring this infrastructure upgrade to our community," said **Madison County Administrator Mark Scimone**. "We worked tirelessly, and we are excited to be able to bring additional broadband service to our residents, as well as a major service competitor, Empire Access, to the area."

"One of my goals was to increase broadband access in Madison County. Now, because of this grant, that will become a reality," said **Madison County Board Chairman John M. Becker**. "With better access to high-speed internet, Madison County will be an even better place to live,

go to school, and do business. Thank you to all of our residents who took part in our survey, as well as those who voiced their concerns over the years, whether it was about lacking service or even being unhappy with their current service options. I would like to thank the USDA for awarding us this grant and Senator Charles Schumer for his assistance. To ECC Technologies, we could not have done this without you and your expertise. To Empire Access, thank you for partnering with us, and welcome to Madison County. And last but not least, thank you to the great team here at Madison County who worked tirelessly to make today happen.”

“Generations ago, the federal government recognized that without affordable access to electricity, Americans couldn’t fully participate in modern society and the modern economy. Broadband internet is the new electricity. It is necessary for Americans to do their jobs, to participate equally in school learning, health care, and to stay connected.” **USDA Rural Development Acting New York State Director Brian Murray said.** “This is why President Biden’s American Jobs Plan prioritizes building ‘future proof’ broadband infrastructure – like the investments we’re announcing today – in unserved and underserved areas so that we finally reach 100 percent high-speed broadband coverage.”

"ECC is proud to support the leadership and residents of Madison County in this critical and transformative initiative," said **Andy Lukasiewicz, the Director of Broadband Services at ECC Technologies.** "Elected officials, community leaders and community members on the project team were unwavering in their desire and commitment to expand equitable world class Broadband throughout the County. A special thanks to Senator Schumer and the USDA ReConnect program for their continued support."

“The USDA ReConnect grant is a game changer for broadband access in Madison County,” said **Jim Baase, Chief Operating Officer of Empire Access.** “Through our public-private partnership with the County, residents and businesses in rural areas will now have access to gigabit fiber optic Internet service.”

Eve Ann Shwartz, Hamilton Town Supervisor and Chairwoman of the Public Utility Service Committee says, “This grant will bring Madison County internet access into the 21st century. High-speed broadband has become nearly as essential as water and electricity for a good quality of life. This is one giant leap in the right direction.”

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