



County Administrator's Office

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Wythe County Fixed Wireless Broadband Development Wireless Internet Service Providers, Tower Construction Contractors and Associated Contractors Request For Proposals/ Request for Qualifications

The Challenge

Wythe County is widely known for its fantastic transportation infrastructure. Our information infrastructure should match so residents and businesses have high-quality Internet service to learn, expand health care options, conduct business, seek entertainment and connect to one another at high speed with reasonable pricing. Wythe County wants to facilitate service expansion but does not want to serve as an authority or service provider.

The Proposed Solution

Design Nine of Blacksburg has just completed a broadband development study for Wythe County. Surveys of county residents indicate that many meet the FCC definition of unserved or underserved customers. Many rely on aging copper networks and have service speeds well below current demand and advertised service levels.

The study recommends Wythe County partner with a private provider to operate county-wide fixed wireless broadband service. To that end, the study includes preliminary engineering and signal propagation with approximate siting of redundant fixed wireless towers. Additional community poles and small towers will be needed to reach the most remote customers.

The Wythe County Board of Supervisors finds there is a current need, adopted public-private partnership guidelines and authorized staff to seek partnerships. The County hereby seeks proposals and qualifications from responsible partners who can meet the County's expected outcomes.

Wythe County seeks to form long-term partnerships with qualified Fixed Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISP) and/or tower construction specialists to make county-wide residential and commercial broadband available to the vast majority of Wythe County consumers by July 2024.

The potential market size is approximately 12,000 residential customers and 700 businesses. Current telecom providers in the area include CenturyLink, Shentel, Citizens Co-op, Point Broadband, mobile services providers and others.

The Ideal Partner

Wythe County desires to quickly scale up Internet service capacity for county residential and business customers. This complex project has multiple phases of development, and Wythe County seeks a private-sector partner prepared to assist through all phases. The ideal partner will address:

- **Funding.** Wythe County is capable of funding a part of the development, but wants to maximize the use of available grant funding, long-term loans and non-local taxpayer funds. The County will give weight to WISPs with a strong track record of applying for and being awarded grant funds and loans from federal and state programs, and who commit to providing resources working with the County to submit grant applications.

- **Availability.** The county expects to use some Federal funds available this spring to deploy the first round of towers and technology. The preferred provider must be available to begin as soon as funds are designated and available.
- **Geographic Challenges.** Wythe County's topography is among the most forgiving in Southwestern Virginia, but the mix of mountainous and valley terrain means partners must serve customers well despite terrain, foliage and topographic challenges.
- **Tower siting.** Preliminary engineering anticipates 16 towers will provide the backbone for county-wide service including some redundancy. The county owns or leases and operates four of those sites for public safety radio service, and additional private sites may be available for lease. The major construction undertaking will be constructing up to 12 county-owned towers or leasing co-locations, connecting through fiber optic cable or microwave transmitters and setting up leases to cover the development expense. Tower lease rates for the selected partner will be negotiated by site based on costs for final construction, grant funds used for the site, property acquisition and rights-of-way costs, and income from other leaseholders.
- **Tower construction.** Grant applications score higher with fully integrated solutions, so the County prefers WISPs who partner with a tower contractor(s) or who have the capability to perform their own construction to build out the county-wide system. The county may consider separate partnerships with tower builders if needed. The county may choose to give weight to potential partners who work with Wythe County businesses as partners or subcontractors. In any case, the County prefers contractors who can both mitigate fall zone hazards and use un-guyed, self-supporting construction methods, with other methods considered case-by-case. In addition to the new towers, the county expects smaller towers and community poles are necessary to fully serve less dense population areas.
- **Speed to completion.** Providers who most readily demonstrate capacity, ability and commitment to deploy service to the greatest number of customers in Wythe County over the shortest period of time will score higher. The county will consider the long-term benefits of all technologies proposed by interested providers, so long as the expected technology service life meets long-term expected needs of the county and customers.
- **Long-term commitment.** The County will give preference to partners who demonstrate long-term corporate stability, a sustainable business model delivering quality service and fair market pricing, successful development of customer base, and a history of maintaining and upgrading equipment to keep customers connected.
- **Service Levels.** The County wants county residents to have access to minimum 25 Mbps download/5 Mbps upload, with both higher download and upload speeds strongly desired. Provide expected service tiers and the expected minimum and maximum upload and download speeds available to most customers.
- **Data access & reliability.** The County more favorably views partners who demonstrate widest availability of access, most reliable uptimes and best consistency of data speeds available to customer vs. data speed paid for by the customer. To that end, the county also prefers candidates who can connect to access points using the most reliable and secure methods.
- **Customer access.** It may be physically impossible or financially impractical to serve every single customer in Wythe County. Preference will be given to those candidates who commit to providing the greatest percentage of Wythe County customers.
- **Customer Equipment & Installation.** Potential partners should give a description of the customer-side customer equipment, expected monthly rental costs, expected customer charges for standard installations, and any other charges associated with a typical customer's initial connection to the fixed wireless system.
- **Other providers.** The County recognizes significant fracture within private data access providers in Wythe County. Preference will be given to those providers who agree to serve the widest geographic area serving the most clients disregarding the presence of other providers.

- **Local Staffing.** The county prefers candidates who demonstrate a history of adequate staffing to ensure timely resolution of individual service outages, widespread loss of network service and other engineering problems which could endanger the public through loss of service. Indicate the planned or existing availability of staff to address technical and service issues.
- **Franchise agreement.** In the event a franchise agreement is needed to operate, demonstrate

Submission Process

- **Pre-register.** Interested firms must submit an introductory notice of interest to mchankins@wytheco.org in order to receive addenda and be notified of meetings. Send your preferred contact information (firm name, contact person, email and phone number).
- **No Fee.** This is a solicitation from the County of Wythe, and no review or submission fees are required.
- **Proposals.** Potential partners must demonstrate the qualifications expected by the County. The county will make available the study documents from Design Nine. All interested parties must submit a package containing the following:
 - **Letter of Introduction & Interest.** Introduce your firm. Help us understand who you are, why you're the best partner for Wythe County and the value you will bring to local Internet consumers. If two or more firms are submitting a joint proposal, help us to understand the relationship between the partners.
 - **Complete required PPEA responses.** The County has adopted guidelines under the Code of Virginia's requirements for public-private partnerships, which are listed with this request for proposals. Respondents should fulfil the requirements of those guidelines for solicited proposals.
 - **Proposal.** Respond to the county's request to explain why this proposal represents the best response to the "Ideal Partner" qualifications, the best value for county customers and the best competition for incumbent providers. Set forth proposed terms for this public-private partnership along with expected development timeline including proposed tracks on securing grant funding. Proposals must meet all requirements of Virginia Code 56-575.4.
 - **Demonstrate capacity.** Thoroughly address your technical capacity (experience, equipment, technology, staff, training), legal capacity to operate (wireless spectrum licensure), staffing, and technology expected to provide service in Wythe County.
 - **Sample service tiers & rate schedule.** Help the County assess service for a variety of customers by providing expected service tiers and pricing for each. Firms may demonstrate this by providing existing service schedules from other localities they serve, so long as the service tiers and pricing are expected to be reasonably similar if awarded the project in Wythe County.
 - **Proprietary Information.** If a proposal includes proprietary information, it must be marked as such. Wythe County is not liable for the release of any information not marked as proprietary.
 - **References.** Provide references and contact information from jurisdictions currently served. The county would like to speak to references from local government partners along with current business and residential customers.
- **Demonstration.** Highest-rated potential partners may be expected to demonstrate the technology at a time and place to be arranged before the negotiation phase.
- **The County Team.** Wythe County's assistant county administrator will lead the project review team, which will include such other county staff, officials or contractors as may be necessary to give a complete and impartial review to the submissions provided.
- **The Review.** The review process is within a very narrow timeframe dictated by state deadlines for applications

The County will directly solicit from known providers in the region, existing telecoms and non-regional providers who express interest in serving Wythe County. This is not and shall not be considered a preference for one of these providers, rather indicating the County's desire to attract the best available partner expanding this vital service to our residents.

Submissions

Submit five print copies and one electronic copy of the proposal (.pdf preferred on USB drive) via courier or hand delivery to:

County of Wythe
Attn: Martha Collins, County Clerk
340 South Sixth Street
Wytheville, VA 24382
Submission Deadline: Monday, May 3, 2021; 4 p.m.

Wythe County assumes no responsibility for delayed or undelivered shipments. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Expected Solicitation & Partnership Development Timeline:

- March 19, 2021 County issues RFP/RFQ through advertisement; pre-registration opens
- April 7, 2 p.m. Preliminary in-person meeting with interested parties to review Design Nine study at 340 South Sixth Street, Wytheville, VA
- April 12 Addendum issued, if needed
- May 3, 4 p.m. Formal responses due to RFP/RFQ
- May 4-7 Staff & Committee Review
- May 10 Staff schedules preferred respondent interviews
- May 17-20 Interviews with preferred respondents
- May 25 Committee recommends for preferred respondents to Wythe County Supervisors
- May 26-June 4 Negotiations with preferred respondent(s), draft partnership agreements & contracts, legal review
- June 8 Board of Supervisors review & approval of partnership
- June 9 Notice of Award, Notice to Proceed
- June 17, 2021 Virginia DHCD VATI Application Window opens

Note that, with the expected exception of the submission deadline, these dates are subject to change due to a variety of circumstances. Any changes to the project timeline will be emailed to all pre-registered submissions.