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ARPA funding unfurls bigger broadband project in Oologah

CLAREMORE – The Rogers County Board of County Commissioners held a special meeting Tuesday Sep. 27 approving \$7,266,889.58 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to 20 organizations.

ARPA provides pandemic relief funds allowing communities to bounce back from Covid-19.

Among those approved is another broadband project that is a much larger than the most recent launch in Inola at Ruby Estates last week. The town of Oologah, located in District 2, will have 21 miles of fiber optics trenched underground in the upcoming weeks connecting 474 residents and 31 businesses.

Commissioners approved \$1,004,445 for the Oologah broadband project, which includes \$401,475 in construction costs and \$602,970 in equipment and materials.

Commissioner Chairman Steve Hendrix of District 2 said, “We have come up with a solution to go that extra mile to connect the underserved portions of Rogers County with reliable hard-wired internet service. That has become one of our priorities.” He emphasized county officials have made a commitment to see this [broadband] project through to its final phase with the help of additional grant funding opportunities.

Rogers County IT Director Brett Williston, who spearheads the broadband project, said this is one in a series of broadband projects involving underserved areas of the county.

“For too long Oologah has been a broadband desert. Rogers County is excited to work with Oologah-based ISP [Internet Service Provider] — Atlas Broadband — to address this gap in broadband coverage,” Williston said. “We have learned from the pandemic that rural areas without appropriate broadband infrastructure are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of remote work and online education. This one-million-dollar investment of ARPA funding will stimulate the economy of Oologah as well as greatly improve the quality of life of its citizens.”

Williston is confident that Rogers County will be able to secure the remaining 18 million dollars of ARPA funding needed to address the digital divide of its almost 14,000 underserved households by 2028.