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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rogers County presents to OBEC

Rogers County Information Technology Director Brett Williston gave a presentation last week to the Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Council (OBEC) during a special meeting.

The OBEC provides recommendations to the Broadband Office to help improve, expand, and reduce the cost of high-speed internet connectivity across Oklahoma.

"The goal of this presentation was to present our plan in hopes of expediting the process for Rogers County to obtain the necessary funding to complete our broadband expansion project throughout the county before 2028," Williston said.

He told the council members and attendees how the idea evolved.

"We started hosting roundtable discussions with local ISPs [Internet Service Providers] in hopes of gathering the information needed for us to formulate an economically viable plan to address the digital divide that too many rural communities face," he said. "These meetings were productive, and the cooperation shown by the various ISPs helped us formulate our plan."

The goal, Williston said, is to bring all underserved rural Rogers County households internet connectivity with minimum download speeds of 100 megabits per second by 2028.

According to recent Rogers County Assessor records, there are 33,652 households in this county. Those households contribute 96,908 of the county's population, which is expected to grow to 133,000 by 2045.

Data from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration shows nearly 18,000 Rogers County households receive median speeds of 25 Mbps, or greater.

"Using the information from our roundtable discussions we were able to get a more accurate picture of our underserved households," he said.

Given the number of households [18,502] –– in the 14 census tract areas that receive 25 Mbps or greater median downloads speeds, minus those in other coverage areas [1,346] –– that left 13,804 underserved households.

He continued to tell the council how that problem can be addressed.

"The ideal solution is 100% fiber, but it is costly in rural areas," he said. "In September of this year, we partnered with a Rogers County-based ISP [Atlas Broadband], to bring fiber internet to the town of Oologah with a $1 million ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) investment. Before this partnership, the maximum download speed Oologah residents could receive via a wireline connection was 10 Mbps."

The Oologah project is scheduled to be completed by early 2023 and residents will have access to one gigabit (GB) download speeds.

The 100 percent twenty-one-mile fiber solution benefiting 474 Oologah households and 31 businesses is expected to cost $1,004,445.

Rogers County Commissioner Ron Burrows of District 3, who also attended the meeting, said during the Rogers County Board of County Commissioners meeting Monday, "I just can't say enough good things about his [Williston's] presentation; what he did to that committee."

The committee, Burrows said, is charged with trying to figure out how to provide broadband across the state, while other states are also facing the same challenges.

The next step, Williston said, "We are actively applying for grants and continuing our work with the state to acquire funding to complete our goals."