

**Presentation to County Board
Broadband Authority
October 20, 2020**

1. First, let me applaud the work of Arlington's Digital Equity group in bringing forward creative ideas to help our residents get essential internet services.
2. Nearly 10 years ago Arlington made a strategic investment – it chose to build a fiber network to provide its own internet services rather than be dependent upon a large internet company.
3. That investment in infrastructure more than paid for itself.
4. Now we find that Arlington residents, as opposed to the County itself, are dependent on large telecoms to provide essential services, and many of our residents are left with insufficient speeds, prohibitive rates, or no service at all.
5. Will Arlington do for its residents what it chose to do for itself?
6. We are at a crossroads.
7. Arlington can continue to address these problems in a reactive, piecemeal fashion, or we can directly address the problem by providing services to our most vulnerable residents.
8. But wait! Arlington cannot directly provide services. Over the past 25 years, the large telecoms have lobbied for legislation that essentially prohibits a municipality from providing internet services to its own residents.
9. Fortunately, in 2003, a visionary Democratic Delegate from southwest VA patroned a bill that would allow a municipality to create a broadband authority empowered to provide internet services directly to residents. The bill garnered bipartisan support and was signed into law by Gov. Mark Warner.
10. Imagine how nimble we could be in addressing this crisis if Arlington had a broadband authority! Instead of commissioning a study, we could use the \$60,000 to lay fiber and provide the services!
11. Since 2003, 30 municipalities in VA have formed broadband authorities. During that time, the large telecoms have tried and failed to change the law. They sued authorities saying the law doesn't say what it says. They lost.
12. A growing group of Arlingtonians have asked the County Board to consider forming a broadband authority.
13. It is against this backdrop that we see the current proposal for a feasibility study. Not to take the bold action that is needed, but to study whether to provide internet to 2 affordable housing complexes, a fraction of the households needing crucial services.

14. Again, we applaud the county's effort, but respectfully submit that the need is much greater.
15. 10 years ago visionaries in Arlington took the bold step of providing our own internet service to county buildings and saved the county millions of dollars. We built excess capacity that could be used to provide service to all Arlingtonians. Our residents are in desperate need of high quality service during this crisis and into the future.
16. Now is the time for bold and visionary action, not for an anemic proposal. We ask you to use these funds to study the feasibility of setting up a broadband authority to provide services to these 2 housing complexes and potentially to many more residences in Arlington.