

Items to Cover in the Arlington Municipal Broadband Feasibility Study

Background: Arlington County, the second-largest "principal city" of the Washington, DC metropolitan area, recognizes the importance of ubiquitous high-speed internet service in a thriving and successful community. High speed internet is no longer simply a convenience for shopping and entertainment. It is a critical service used by schools, businesses, and governments to interact with their students, customers and citizens.

Specifics: Arlington County is considering how to ensure that access to high-speed internet is available and affordable to all residents and businesses in Arlington. In doing so, Arlington must seek to determine the following:

1. Can Arlington's existing, county-owned, optical fiber network, i.e. ConnectArlington, be used to provide the backbone of a county-wide municipal high-speed internet network;
2. What is the best approach to use in terms of extending ConnectArlington to residences, businesses, and anchor institutions in Arlington that wish to have a connection? This study should identify which technology would best meet the guidelines of the U.S. Treasury Department's Interim Final Rule to Implement the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, ensuring symmetrical service of at least 100/100 Mbps or greater, while providing the best currently proven capacity for scalability to meet reliability and data needs well into the future;
3. Determine which approach, that satisfies the provisions above, provides the greatest flexibility and least legal liability under Virginia law, based on existing precedents within the State, while also providing the County the greatest possible ability to retain public control and public ownership of any additional infrastructure that is constructed or installed using public funds as part of any project to provide high speed internet service in the County using the ConnectArlington network;
4. Determine what business model, network scale, and network architecture (in line with the results of the assessments above) would best enable the County to use and expand upon its existing optical fiber network to serve currently unserved and underserved¹ households over the long-term with the least amount of direct subsidies from the County's general fund and with the greatest amount of cost sharing among stakeholders and subscribers;
5. Based on the results of the assessments above, assess the approximate cost of implementing the business model, network scale, and network architecture best suited to meet the aforementioned objectives and criteria and provide the best and fastest return on investment.
6. Assess what additional aspects of forming a competitive municipal broadband internet provider need to be studied and the proper scope and funding needed to make such studies successful.

¹ For the purposes of this assessment, "unserved" means households that are unable to afford an in-home wired internet connection at any price point, whereas "underserved" are households with an in-home wired or wireless connection that does not meet U.S. Treasury guidelines of being future-proof, adequate for using essential digital services, and reliable.