

8.7.2020

Dear Pine Plains,

This week the Broadband Committee had a 90-minute conversation with a resident of Ancram who has been working on the Broadband issue. It was mind-blowing, mainly because of the way the companies that provide the lines work. The key phrase he hammered at us was basically this: they are not altruistic. It's all about the money. Follow the money. There is no business reason for companies to run broadband to remote homes.

The government, however, recognizes that by providing broadband service to more people, tax revenues go up, because there is a direct relationship between internet capability and increased business revenues.

To that end, he taught us how to track the true information about why there is no broadband in certain areas, or strong enough broadband to serve people adequately. He divided the town into "census blocks" and showed us the work ahead, which will require participation by everyone for whom broadband is an issue. Basically, we have to find the errors in the way broadband was tracked by the providers and demand service in those areas. If one house in a census block has high speed internet, the block becomes ineligible for FCC funding for more high-speed cable. This means that people need to sign up for the provider who serves their area, and sign up with the most expensive plan, in order to receive adequate service. Follow the money.

We are going to be creating a spreadsheet collecting the names, addresses, census block IDs, AND here's where you come in: you need to find out what your internet speed is. No one else can do this for you. And there are two speeds to consider: your "promised speed" by your provider, and your actual speed. So available speed can be very different than actual speed. When speed is displayed, there are 2 numbers shown: for instance, 25/3. Those numbers reflect download/upload speed. 25/3 is the lowest speed that is in any way useful to working from home and is considered by the FCC to be the industry standard. BUT it doesn't really work well. HughesNet, Co-axial, copper cable, Starlink all provide inadequate speed. The only decent available technology for speeds that allow working from home/schoolwork is fiber optic. This information is called a Form 477, and is available from your internet service provider.

The pandemic has brought this back into focus in ways that have created momentum once again for money for municipalities to get full broadband coverage. It's going to take a lot of effort on the part of townspeople to help us achieve this. Look for the call to fill out a survey collecting your data, probably here in this newsletter and on our Facebook page and website.

Our next meeting will be with G-Tel out of Germantown, on increasing internet providers in the hamlet for competition.

Don't forget that County Executive Molinaro and I will be handing out lunches for seniors on Tuesday at the high school parking lot in a drive-through Senior Picnic Covid Special Day. Why not take your meals down to the beach and sit at a table there for a lovely afternoon out?

I hope to see you there.

Stay masked, Pine Plains! You are all superheroes.

Darrah Cloud