



# NEWS FROM **ULSTER COUNTY** County Executive Jen Metzger

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## **Ulster County Poised to Benefit from Nearly \$21 Million in Federal Funding to Expand Broadband Service to Unserved Areas**

**KINGSTON, NY** - Ulster County has been awarded \$20.8 million through New York State's ConnectALL Deployment Program to expand broadband access to nearly 1,300 unserved households, businesses, and community facilities located in more remote and less densely populated areas of the County. The total investment in Ulster County would be \$61,799,320, which includes a \$40,938,790 match committed by Verizon to the project. This award is federally funded and goes to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for final approval, following a public comment process.

The funding will enable Verizon to extend its point-to-point fiber optic network to eligible locations under the federal BEAD program — short for Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment — which was created as part of the 2022 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to expand high-speed internet access in unserved and underserved areas of the country. In New York, the program is administered by the NYS ConnectALL Office and targets the final 1% of locations in the state without reliable internet access, typically in more rural areas of the state.

The ConnectALL Office awarded BEAD funding to internet service providers through a competitive application process, using scoring criteria prescribed by the NTIA. County Executive Jen Metzger participated in the evaluation process, together with the Ulster County Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion, and issued a letter of support for Verizon's application based on its proposal to serve all three BEAD-eligible geographic areas of the County, its capacity to build and maintain the system, and the company's commitment to fair labor practices.

“Reliable broadband is a necessity in today's world for education, work, healthcare, public safety, and daily life,” **said Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger.** “Thanks to the NYS ConnectALL award and Verizon’s substantial match, nearly 1,300 homes, businesses, and community anchor institutions in rural Ulster County will finally be connected with reliable fiber optic service. I want to give a special thanks to the Ulster County Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion, created by Comptroller March Gallagher in 2022 and chaired by Denning artist, professor, and volunteer firefighter Jenny Lee, for laying significant groundwork to get us to this day. I also want to thank Verizon and Communications Workers of America Local 1120 and District 1 for their partnership in closing broadband gaps in our County.”

“This is a proud moment for our Commission,” **said Jenny Lee, Chair of the Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion.** “We’ve worked hard to ensure that every location, no matter how remote, has a fair shot at digital access. The internet touches every part of life — from employment to education to social connection — and this award levels the playing field for all. Our research showed that fiber optics was the optimal solution and that Verizon, with its existing infrastructure and workforce, was uniquely qualified to implement it. In addition, Verizon’s match is critical to bringing this buildout to fruition.”

The all-volunteer Commission, which includes librarians, educators, town officials, and first responders, seeks to advance equitable access to broadband, digital literacy, and devices for all Ulster County residents and institutions. Its members have held broadband town halls, mapped access gaps, and challenged state and federal broadband maps. In addition to its contributions to the ConnectALL process, the Commission's advocacy also helped secure a USDA Technical Assistance grant for fiber expansion in Denning and supported Margaretville Telephone Company’s fiber buildout in Phoenicia.

"I have witnessed firsthand how vital fiber broadband infrastructure is to public safety and emergency response to education, healthcare, business, and civic engagement," **said Ulster County Comptroller March Gallagher.** "That’s why in 2022, I established the Ulster County Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion to champion this essential cause. Thanks to the visionary leadership of Commission Chair Jenny Lee and the collaborative efforts of partner Verizon, we have secured over \$20 million to deliver fiber broadband to every last mile of Ulster County. This achievement is a direct result of the Commission’s meticulous mapping, unwavering community outreach, and tireless advocacy. On behalf of myself and all residents, I extend deep gratitude to these committed individuals who ensured Ulster County received its fair share of funding to build a stronger, more connected future for us all."

“The BEAD program represents a once-in-a-generation investment in broadband infrastructure, with the power to connect New Yorkers to high-speed internet and strengthen good jobs in our communities,” **said Dennis Trainor, Vice President, CWA District 1.** “CWA District 1 has worked tirelessly to ensure this funding supports companies that deploy future-proof fiber technology and hire a directly-employed, highly skilled, and well-trained workforce. We’re proud that CWA members who live and work in Ulster County will be bringing Verizon Fios to their neighbors. We’re deeply grateful to County Executive Jen Metzger for her longtime commitment and partnership in expanding access to top-quality broadband while safeguarding good union jobs — and we thank the Broadband Commission for its critical role in making this vision a reality.”

Ulster County remains committed to bridging the digital divide and will continue to support the Commission’s work as implementation begins.

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