

Vermont Community Broadband Board Expands Town Match Grant



The Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) will match town Local Fiscal Recovery ARPA fund contributions dedicated to broadband in an expanded town match program as part of the VCBB's Act 71 Broadband Construction Grant Program. To be matched, the funds must be pledged to the Communications Union District (CUD) serving the town or to an eligible provider committing to build out to all underserved locations in a community if the town is not a member of a CUD. The goal of the program is to accelerate the build-out of 100/100 Mbps broadband while decreasing its cost and providing affordable service for town residents.

This is a great opportunity for towns to boost the power of the dollars they spend getting their residents connected. This match enables their funds to go much further, getting them connected faster and ultimately at a lower cost. The more money that comes from grants like this, the better for our towns, said Governor Phil Scott.

Most pledges will flow through the Communications Union Districts. The CUDs' plan to use the funds to overcome obstacles unique to each town, cover the cost of drops to low-income residents, accelerate the build-out in the town, or support build-out to areas with existing service not meeting the needs of the community. The funds may also allow a CUD to pursue innovative financing to save residents money over the long term. This could include using the town funds to leverage other federal programs, buying down of interest rates, letters of credit, or creating revolving loan funds for the purpose of expanding broadband.

VLCT has encouraged towns, cities and villages that accepted ARPA funds to be patient and look for opportunities to leverage their local awards. The VCBB Town ARPA Match Program is an excellent opportunity for the local leadership of Vermont communities that have identified access to broadband as one of



their top priorities to multiply their ARPA dollars and deliver this essential service to their residents, said Katie Buckley, Director at Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

"The VCBB would like to thank all the towns that have already pledged money to this program and encourage other towns to consider it. These funds offer the Communications Union Districts increased flexibility and will drive down the overall cost of deploying a fiber optic network and the end cost to consumers," said Rob Fish, VCBB Deputy Director.

So far, 40 towns from across the state have pledged a total of \$2.49 million to their CUDs or providers that will be matched. Cornwall and Holland are two of those towns.

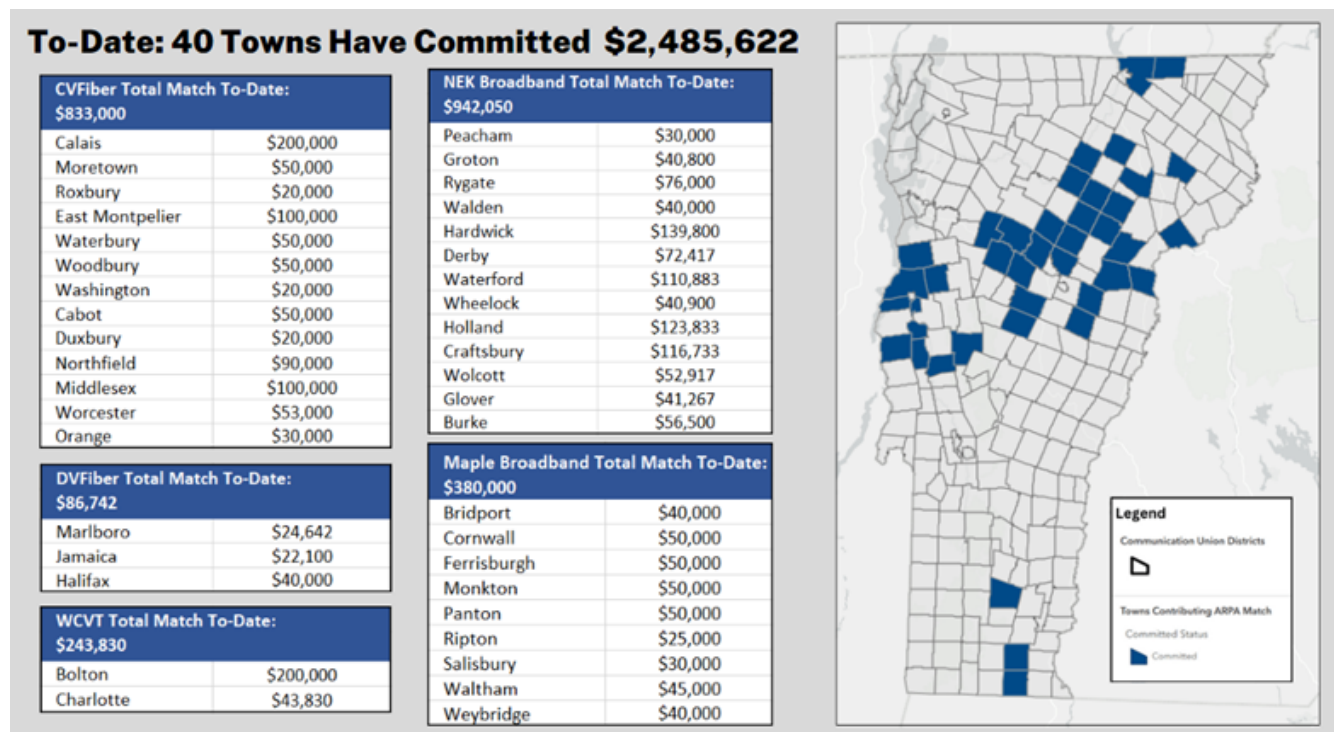
Cornwall Select Board Chair Benjamin Marks said, "I am proud that Cornwall was able to take a leadership role in early ARPA fund allocation to Maple Broadband. The VCBB grant match doubles the good we were able to do with our initial grant and will be an important consideration for our future allocation of ARPA funds. Cornwall is underserved by the legacy DSL copper-wire currently in place. I firmly believe that fiber optic service at the highest speeds is necessary for us to function in a 21st century environment. The more Maple Broadband's build-out is funded outside of the debt markets, the lower the cost will be to Cornwall residents who need this vital service."

"The Select board in the town of Holland earmarked 68% of its total ARPA funds towards accelerating NEK Broadband's network build, which is the highest proportionally that a town has contributed to date. These funds (along with the matches from both the Vermont Community Broadband Board and NEK Broadband) will result in service to 93 addresses (11 of which have been designated by the state as priority), and over 9.1 miles of fiber optic cable in the town of Holland," said Christa Shute, Executive Director of NEK



Community Broadband.

Town pledges will be matched up to \$100,000 per town. The Local Fiscal Recovery Funds must be provided to the Communications Union District (CUD) serving the town or to an eligible provider in towns that are not members of a Communications Union District. The CUD or the nonmember towns must be participating in the Act 71 Broadband Construction Grant Program to receive the match. Towns must pledge the funds before May 31, 2023, to be eligible for the match.



Apply for Match Funds

Submit the following information electronically to vcbb.grants@vermont.gov:

1) Letter from town or copy of contractual agreement

To qualify for the VCBB match, a CUD or other eligible provider must provide a letter



from the contributing community detailing the information below and/or a contractual agreement between the CUD or other eligible provider and the town. This letter should be submitted to the Communication Union District serving your town or an eligible provider in non-CUD towns. The letter must detail the following:

- Amount of match
- Whether the town elected for revenue replacement or confirmation that the proposed use of funding provided by the town is allowed under Treasury Rules
- The need for increased access to 100/100 Mbps broadband in the community or region
- Any conditions attached to the funds

2) Memo from the CUD or other eligible provider summarizing all pledges received before May 31, 2023

- Formally ask the VCBB to match the town's contribution
- Confirming that a universal service plan and Act 71-compliant business plan exists for the town or CUD.
- High-level budget for the use of matching funds provided by the VCBB.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact Rob Fish, Deputy Director of the VCBB, at robert.fish@vermont.gov or 802-522-2617.

