

BLOUNT COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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RANDY VINEYARD
FINANCE DIRECTOR



MEMO

TO: Blount County Budget Committee/County Commissioners

FROM: Randy Vineyard
Director of Accounts & Budgets

RE: MACnet Fiber Extension

DATE: June 2, 2021

For years, Blount County governments, partnered with city utilities, have been using its optical fiber resources to make government, public safety, and education, more efficient. Together, we've successfully created free Wi-Fi zones in public places outside our schools, malls, and our library.

More recently, we've been working hard with Education Networks of America (ENA) to devise better options for distance learning. With the help of ENA engineers, we came up with a plan that uses about 80% of our existing fiber while requiring only about 20% of new. Before the 21/22 school year begins, we will have expanded physical network access to every school in Blount County except Prospect, Walland, and Townsend. (Those last 3 are about a year out!) That's over 16.9 miles of new fiber in less than 6 weeks.

These connections will provide much faster, more stable internet connections for BC Schools allowing for improved quality learning experiences both in the classroom and for distance learners, in their homes. It will also provide more secure connections for each of the school's security camera systems monitored by 911, as well as the latest SARA security alerting system throughout the County.

Working with ENA engineers, we've architected a "collapsed ring" design that minimizes the costs of building while maximizing the speed of deployment. All parties have agreed that this is the best path forward.

I am recommending that we appropriate \$353,000 from the General Fund Balance to pay to MACnet to extend fiber from the poles to the school buildings as identified on the list attached. The cost associated with each extension for the fiber/materials and installation. The work will be performed by the appropriate utility company.

We believe this cost is an eligible expense to be reimbursed by the American Rescue Plan.