

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY
GOVERNMENT

BROADBAND ADVISORY COUNCIL

LONG DRIVEWAY – CATEGORY 3 PROGRAM

Version 1

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1.0 Introduction

The Queen Anne’s County (QAC) Government (“the County”) has been working to deliver high-speed internet to its rural areas, but due to our geography, topography, and heterogeneous population density, our efforts have been met with significant challenges. However, since 2019, efforts from County staff, the elected Board of County Commissioners, and the State of Maryland have dedicated resources to assist in bringing access to high-speed internet into previously unserved areas. And recently – due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this funding has become even more robust.

The Broadband Advisory Council (BAC) was formed in January 2017, comprised of a diverse group of members of the public across the County. The BAC was formed to advise and provide recommendations to the County Commissioners on the provision of broadband services and infrastructure in the County.

The BAC contracted with Columbia Telecommunications Corporations (CTC) Technology & Energy to prepare a Broadband Strategic Plan.

The County hired CTC Technology & Energy (CTC) in 2019 to develop a strategic plan to address the needs for broadband in unserved parts of the County. CTC performed the following tasks at the County’s direction:

- Identified, at a high level, unserved areas of the County, based on data and maps provided by the County, other public data sets, and desk and field surveys
- Met with key public and private stakeholders to identify broadband needs
- Met with representatives of internet service providers (ISP) operating in the County (or with potential interest to operate in the County) to learn what market forces or County support might lead them to invest in the County
- Prepared a high-level design and cost estimate for a fiber optic network deployment to fill the identified broadband gaps in the County
- Prepared a high-level design and cost estimate for a fixed wireless network deployment that might help fill broadband gaps in the County
- Analyzed a range of federal and state funding opportunities to identify potential sources of grants or loans (to the County or to ISPs) that might support the expansion of broadband services in unserved areas
- Developed a series of potential strategies the County could pursue to leverage federal and state funding to meet its broadband goals

In February 2020, the Plan was finalized and defined three categories of unserved areas in Queen Anne’s County:

- Category 1 – no existing broadband infrastructure in the area
- Category 2 – “unserved pockets” in areas where broadband infrastructure exists but has not been extended due to area not meeting cable provider’s density requirements
- Category 3 – long driveways where the cost of extending to the home is a barrier for service

The County's Broadband Strategic Plan has been and continues to be a crucial tool in applying for grant funding and for developing the Long Driveway – Category 3 (LD-Cat3) Grant Program, which will address the Category 3 properties identified above.

Lastly, funding the construction of long driveways is a unique opportunity for residents and the County. The County will closely monitor the program and due to its unique nature, we fully anticipate that changes or updates may need to be made to the requirements documented within the program. We reserve the right to update the dates, funding, criteria, and any other item within this document.

2.0 Definitions

Broadband – high-speed internet that reaches a download speed of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) or faster and an upload speed of 3 Mbps or faster, as defined by the Federal Communications Commission

Internet Service Provider (ISP) – a company that can provide access to the internet. There are currently six ISPs in Queen Anne's County : Breezeline, Bay Country Communications, Choptank Fiber, Comcast Xfinity, Talkie Communications and ThinkBig Networks

LD-Cat3 – Long Driveway – Category 3 Grant Program

Service Drop – the last part of the installation of fiber/cable, such as along a driveway, that connects the home to the network. The ISP will determine the appropriate construction method and route for the Service Drop. The resident may not choose the method or route of installation.

3.0 Program Guidelines

The Queen Anne's County Government has established the Long Driveway – Category 3 Grant Program (LD-Cat3) to provide financial assistance to our Category 3 residents. The LD-Cat3 will assist with funding the construction of Service Drops to connect homes at the end of long, private driveways to the existing broadband network on the road.

A resident is only eligible if their residence lacks access to broadband service and does not fall within an area designated to be served via the Broadband Buildout Projects map. They are ineligible for LD- Cat3 funding if the service location currently has or will have high-speed internet service from one of the County's current ISPs –Breezeline, Bay Country, Choptank Fiber, Comcast, Talkie or ThinkBig

Additionally, to be eligible for the LD-Cat3, an ISP (Breezeline, Bay Country, Choptank Fiber, Comcast, Talkie or ThinkBig) must have a network which runs on the road to which the driveway connects*. The ISP must be able to provide service to the location AND be willing to partner with the County on this initiative.

Funding awarded will be based on (1) the ISPs' ability to provide service, (2) length of the driveway, and (3) cost estimate for the service drop. Service drops that are funded through the LD-Cat3 must be completed on or before June 30, 2025. Cable installation will follow the best cost-effective feasible path and not necessarily follow existing driveway. Installation will be a single drop per existing domicile. Drops will not be provided for any non-existing domiciles at address. Shared driveways may share cable path among multiple residences to reduce cost, assuming technically feasible.

3.1 Steps to Obtain LD-Cat3 Funding

- 1) The resident will apply for the LD-Cat3 on the County's website (www.qac.org).
- 2) The County will forward the resident's information to the appropriate ISP(s).
- 3) The ISP will contact the County to:
 - a. Verify that the residents home does not fall in an area designated to be served via the Broadband Buildout Projects map.
 - b. Verify the ISPs network infrastructure passes by the resident's home*
 - c. Verify that a service drop to the resident's home can be constructed
 - d. Provide a cost estimate
 - ISPs are private, independent, and for-profit companies. The County does not have any input into, or control over, the quotes that are provided by the ISPs.
- 4) Once the County and the ISP have determined that all the criteria in 3.1 (3) have been met, the resident will work with the ISP to install infrastructure to provide broadband. Each ISP has a unique process to obtain service utilizing the LD-Cat3. The resident will need to work directly with the ISP to obtain service.
- 5) The resident will pay their portion of the cost directly to the ISP. The ISP will bill the County for the County's portion of the cost.

3.2 LD-Cat3 Funding Formula

- 1) The County will pay 90% of the amount of the service drop cost.
 - a. The County 90% portion cannot be greater than \$13,500.
- 2) The maximum amount the County will contribute for any service drop is \$15,000.
- 3) The cost of the service drop will be the standard ISP fee for this service.
- 4) The resident will pay the remaining balance of the service drop charge. The resident's contribution will be due based upon the ISP's unique billing procedures and their terms and conditions.

3.3 Hardship Waiver

Residents that qualify for the [Affordable Connectivity Program | Federal Communications Commission \(fcc.gov\)](https://www.fcc.gov) may also receive a hardship waiver for the 10% resident contribution for the service drop costs. Residents must provide proof that they have been accepted into the Affordable Connectivity Program in order to qualify for the hardship waiver.

3.4 Special Considerations and Exceptions

- 1) The resident may be required to provide an easement for the ISP to install the service drop. The easement will provide the ISP the right to use the homeowner's land while constructing or maintaining the service drop. The homeowner still owns the land, even if they grant an easement.
- 2) Residents are limited to one service drop per household.
- 3) The resident may not choose the method or route of installation for the service drop. Costs associated with any resident preferences can and/or may include additional charges which will be the responsibility of the resident and not the County. These charges will be excluded from the grant provided by the County.

* Homes where an existing ISP network is not directly in front of a residence but are within very close proximity (~1500' +/-) will be considered on a case-by-case basis.