

# Counties join group to expand internet access

## CARES Act funds will pay for projects

---

**By Justin Strawser**  
*jstrawser@dailyitem.com*  
**and Eric Scicchitano**  
*escicchitano@dailyitem.com*

---

Commissioners in Northumberland and Union counties on Tuesday voted to join an economic development council in an effort to expand broadband in the Valley.

Both sets of leaders voted at public meetings on Tuesday to become members of DRIVE (Driving Real Innovation for a Vibrant Economy), an economic development council serving Montour and Columbia counties, and seek the expansion of quality internet in areas of the region lacking the service. The funding comes from each county's allocation of the CARES Act, which provides for payments to state, local, and tribal governments navigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Snyder County Commissioners already voted to join DRIVE, according to Commissioner Joe Kantz.

Northumberland County committed \$1 million of its \$8.2 million CARES allocation toward DRIVE and expanding broadband internet.

"This will be for the outskirts that don't have good reception and schools," said Commissioner Chair-

---

See **INTERNET**, Page B2

# Counties join group to expand internet access

**INTERNET**, from Page B1

man Sam Schiccatano. "This has to be done by the end of the year. Any improvement in broadband will have to be completed by DRIVE by the end of December."

Commissioner Kymberley Best said some of the money will be used to create hotspots to provide internet access.

Commissioner Joe Klebon said expanding broadband is "very important," especially for schools going back into session in the upcoming academic year. School districts are considering hybrid learning where students attend classes in person as well as online learning.

"This is a big initiative we have to get straightened out, especially with education for the kids," said Klebon. Who knows what will happen with COVID?"

The remainder of the \$8.2 million is available for municipalities, businesses, non-profit organizations and other entities that have had issues related to COVID-19. Applications will be available through the county starting Wednesday, said Schiccatano.

Union County Commissioners voted to join DRIVE at a one-time cost of \$250,000. The funds will come from the county's anticipated estimated \$4 million it will receive through the federal CARES Act for recovery from COVID-19.

The board is targeting at least partial use of that funding to expand broadband capability in western Union County, citing the need to improve remote learning and business opportunities during the pandemic. Other potential uses include grants for local businesses and nonprofits recovering from lost revenue and donations caused by the pandemic.

The Union County Board of Commissioners has not formally approved how the entire allotment of funding will be spent.

"They have a good track record of being able to deploy broadband projects in Montour and Columbia counties," Union County Commissioner Stacy Richards said.

Union County Commissioner Jeff Reber said, to serve remote points of western Union County, he expects the broadband expansion to use existing towers in a point-to-point system. He said it's likely the project would incorporate high-points on

utility poles and farm silos to broaden the internet access.

Preston Boop, chairman of the Union County board, said incorporating the West End Library in Laurelton was necessary.

"I figured if we could get it to the West End Library, we'd get some other people along the way," Boop said.

There's a Dec. 30 deadline to spend the CARES Act funds, the Union County commissioners said.

Jennifer Wakeman, executive director of DRIVE, said the council provides the "backbone and contracts with ISPs" to provide service to end-users

"We are very excited to have Northumberland and Union Counties join DRIVE," said Wakeman. "Access to broadband has come to the forefront during the COVID pandemic as we are now looking for ways to deliver work, education, and healthcare virtually. DRIVE's proven success in bringing terrestrial fixed-base wireless service to Montour County put us in a position to be able to meet the needs in Northumberland and Union counties within the short time frame afforded by the CARES Act. We're honored that the commissioners put their trust in DRIVE and look forward to serving the residents and businesses of Northumberland and Union counties."

## FOOD INSPECTIONS

Restaurants are inspected throughout the year by state and local agents. Inspection reports are submitted to state, and can be viewed online by visiting the website <http://EatSafePa.com> and clicking on "Food Safety Inspection Reports."

## The Daily Item

200 Market Street  
Sunbury, PA, 17801  
[www.dailyitem.com](http://www.dailyitem.com)  
570-286-5671  
Fax: 570-286-2570  
(800) 792-2303

## NEWSROOM

**How to submit tips for news, photographs**  
Call the newsroom at 570-863-3213 or (800) 792-2303.  
Fax your tips at 570-286-7695 or e-mail tips to: