



Yates County Broadband ReConnect Project Meets Two Major Milestones

For Immediate Release (May 2021)

Deals signed for Network Operations and Engineering

There hasn't been much news around the \$14M high-speed internet USDA ReConnect project that was awarded to the County last year. But behind the scenes, the County's Broadband Committee has been working away diligently and have brought two major contracts to the Legislature for review and approval. These agreements go a long way towards advancing the ReConnect project which will bring internet access to over 1600 premises in the County.

County Administrator, Nonie Flynn, notes that "The need for rural broadband has never been more apparent than it is now – as our County manages the coronavirus emergency. Access to telehealth services, remote learning for school children, and remote business operations all require access to broadband. The timing of our Project couldn't be better. The USDA funding has been essential for turning our vision into a reality in these times of extra tight budgets."

The vision of the Yates County Legislature is that every premise in the County has access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet. The County is moving towards this vision by supporting a combination of publicly and privately funded programs. Many residents have commented about trucks from internet service providers (ISP's) like Spectrum, Empire Access and Frontier buzzing around the County. This is not work on the ReConnect project yet. Rather it's ISP's privately expanding their networks which the County wholeheartedly supports. But what about the ReConnect project?

A first task of the Broadband Committee was to recommend the business and operational model for the ReConnect project. It was determined that it was in the County's best interest not to be a telecommunications operator of the installed network, but rather look to partner with an existing ISP. After considering various candidates, the County has reached a multi-year services agreement with Empire Access. This public-private arrangement builds upon the best of each organization. The final agreement provides a mutually beneficial business arrangement for the operation of the network, with Yates County retaining the ownership of the network.

Empire Access, headquartered in Prattsburgh, NY, is locally owned and operated. They already provide Fiber Optic service in portions of Yates County, and are well known for



their competitive pricing and high customer satisfaction ratings. Residents and businesses will have access to Fiber Optic Internet, Phone, TV and Security services. Expect to see direct mailings and communications from Empire Access as portions of the network become operational.

“We are excited to partner with Yates County to offer high-speed fiber optic Internet in rural areas of the county that do not have fast, reliable access today,” said Jim Baase, Chief Operation Officer at Empire Access.



The next major project accomplishment has been selection of New York Engineering Services (NYES) as the professional engineering firm who will be responsible to finalize the network design and then to provide oversight during the Construction phase. A \$1.06M contract with NYES was approved by the Yates County Legislature in April. NYES brings a wealth of broadband engineering experience to the project and has worked with both telecom and municipal customers. They also have extensive experience working on USDA grant funded projects which have their own layers of complexity and rules to follow.

Bart Bretsch, President, New York Engineering Services, comments that “We are very excited to partner with Yates County on this Broadband Project. The RFP vetting process was very thorough and professional, and we continue to be impressed with the Yates County team. They are focused on the mission to deliver high speed internet to every Yates County citizen, and will prove to be great stewards of the Federal Grant money they have been awarded.”

The ReConnect project will require strong coordination between Yates County, Empire Access and New York Engineering Services. Communication channels have been established and routine meetings are underway. NYES will be setting up an office on Main St., Penn Yan for the duration of the project. And starting in May NYES employees will be seen driving around the County doing fielding work – taking measurements along roads and near premises to be connected. Finally some of those trucks driving around will be for the ReConnect project!

Once the Engineering Plans and Specifications are finalized, the project will move into a bid process to secure the Construction firm who will do the actual build. The goal is to start construction Fall 2021. Construction will proceed in phases and once those are determined, residents will be able to track status and progress on the County’s ReConnect internet site at yatesconnect.org

Questions or more information can be obtained through the project office via dlong@yatescounty.org or mwalrath@yatescounty.org.