

Your help is needed if we are to bring Next Generation Fiber Optic Broadband Communications to Sharps Chapel now and to the whole of Union County in the near future.

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) accepted 59 Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant Applications requesting \$61M; only \$15M is available for funding. The purpose of these grants are to help bring true broadband fiber-optic based internet service to underserved areas of Tennessee. The decision on which of these 59 grants are funded is now based upon public comment. **The public comment period will run from 28 November through 20 December 2018.** In order to help ensure that Sunset Digital Communications, the only applicant submitting a plan to provide broadband service to Union County, is successfully chosen for an award, it is imperative that each and every Union County citizen, business and elected official submit comments showing support of their proposal.

### **Help for submitting your comments**

To aid community residents, the Union County Business & Professional Association will host an interactive post on the Association's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/UCBPA/>, and answer any questions that individuals may have. The Union County Chamber of Commerce will do the same on their page, <https://www.facebook.com/UnionCountyTnChamberOfCommerce/>. You can like and follow these Facebook pages to stay current on the progress of this grant and get answers to any questions you may have.

Help is also available at the Sharps Chapel Book Station for residents with no current internet service or with questions on how to do the speed test or enter information at the TNECD Portal.

In addition to the need for showing strong community support for their proposal, another reason this grass roots effort is required, is that the FCC Broadband Deployment (FCC 477 data) maps being used to determine eligible areas for grant funding are built using data from current service providers and many times do not reflect the actual service being provided at the home or business. Importantly, in order for an area to be considered adequately served, service at or exceeding 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload must be available to ALL residential customers in the defined area. Therefore, if the maximum service speeds available to you at your home or business are less than 10 Mbps download and less than 1 Mbps upload, it will help to prove that your area is underserved and in need of broadband service.

### **Background**

As mentioned earlier, only one company, Sunset Digital Communications, submitted a proposal to the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant for Union County. With matching funds, the grant request totals over \$3.5M focusing on Sharps Chapel, as Sunset Digital is currently working just across the county line in Claiborne County. Sunset Digital's fiber-to-the-premises service will offer speeds up to 10,000x faster than DSL or cable.

The state will announce the winning grant recipients in March 2019.

All residents of the Sharps Chapel Community, members of the public and elected officials in Union County are highly encouraged to make comments on the grant application Sunset Digital submitted. The public comment period started on November 28 and runs through December 20, 2018.

Public comments must be received through an online form; no mail or email will be accepted. Public comments will be considered during the scoring process. Comments from the proposed service area with insufficient evidence or documentation will be disregarded. Public comments may be subject to public disclosure. Grant finalists will be sent their public comments for review and response in January 2019.

### **Broadband speed test**

The maps, the state uses to determine eligible areas for grant funding, are built using data from current service providers and many times do not reflect the actual service being provided at homes and businesses in the area. The state considers service at or exceeding 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload as adequate. If a few homes or businesses have broadband speeds at or better than that standard, the area is still eligible for grant funding if most locations cannot achieve that speed. However, if you are commenting as a Sharps Chapel resident you need to provide evidence that the service is not up to this level at your location.

It is essential that those with wired (DSL) internet document their current access speed at <http://www.speedtest.net/> When you press the “GO” icon, the following will appear after the speed test is run.



The speed test will record your current “Ping”, “Download”, and “Upload Speeds”. This information will need to be provided as part of your public comment to validate the request for grant funds to bring Sunset Digital’s next generation fiber optic broadband network to your home or business in Sharps Chapel.

**PING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DOWNLOAD SPEED:** \_\_\_\_\_

**UPLOAD SPEED:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Steps to make a public comment

To make and submit comments follow these steps:

1. Go to this internet site: <https://www.tn.gov/ecd/rural-development/tennessee-broadband-grant-initiative/tnecd-broadband-accessibility-grant.html>
2. Navigate to the Public Comment tab near the middle of the page and enter 'Sharps Chapel Broadband Project' in the "Search all data" box.

Timeline Scoring **Public Comment**

### Public Comment

To ensure transparency and best use of taxpayer funds, the application process includes an online public comment period from November 28 until December 20, 2018.

Internet providers, elected officials and community members are encouraged to comment on any projects in which they either wish to show support for an application or have objections about an application's proposed service area. Where evidence demonstrates that an area is currently served with a fixed, terrestrial speed of 10mb/1mb, grant applicants will be disqualified.

All public comments must be received through the online form below.

Mapping file upon request to [ECD.Broadband@tn.gov](mailto:ECD.Broadband@tn.gov)

Search all data

Sharps Chapel Broadband Project

Application #45 from Sunset Digital will appear. You can download the map of the proposed grant funded service area by clicking the "Map" icon.

Application #	Applicant	Project Name	Grant Amount	Technology	Proposed Service Area
45	Sunset Digital Holding, LLC	Sharps Chapel Broadband Project	1556249.69	Fiber to the Premise	<a href="#">Map</a>

1 to 1 of 1 records (filtered from 57 total entries)

First Previous 1 Next Last

3. You must check the box that best describes you. Are you a resident in Sharps Chapel, operate a business in the Chapel, are you a Union County elected official, or are you an "Other Community Member" (e.g., an owner of a lot/land in Sharps Chapel, or a citizen of Union County located outside of the proposed grant funded service area, such as Maynardville, Plainview or Luttrell).

### Comment on Application

Which of the following best describes you (select all that apply)\*

- ☒ Resident in proposed service area
- ☒ Business owner in proposed service area
- ☒ Elected official
- ☐ Internet service provider
- ☐ Other community member (please describe)

#### Community Members

**Public Comment Guidelines:**

All comments collected during the public comment period may be subject to public disclosure.

Grant applicants are not allowed to enter comments on behalf of community members unless the community member has requested special assistance in submitting the form.

If you check “Other Community Member” an explain box will open allowing you to describe who you represent, i.e. a concerned citizen of Union County.

A Community Member input form will open and you need to identify yourself.

**Community Members**

**Public Comment Guidelines:**

All comments collected during the public comment period may be subject to public disclosure.

Grant applicants are not allowed to enter comments on behalf of community members unless the community member has requested special assistance in submitting the form.

**Name \***

First Name Last Name

**Email \***

**Phone \***

**Address \***

City State ZIP Code

**Organization \***

**Title \***

4. Select which application you are commenting on:

‘45 – Sharps Chapel Broadband Project’

5. Check the box on the type of feedback you are providing.

Which application are you commenting on? \*

45 - Sharps Chapel Broadband Project

What type of feedback are you providing (select all that apply) \*

☒ I'm expressing support for this grant application

☐ Other

**Explain \***

Attach or link documents that support your feedback.

Browse...

Submit Form

In the “Explain” box you need to provide evidence from the Speed Test that demonstrates that you currently do not have fixed terrestrial (wired DSL or dial up) broadband speed of at least 10 Mbps /1 Mbps. If you have dial-up or if you have satellite broadband, for example HughesNet, state that and the reason why, i.e. no terrestrial broadband service is available at my location or the available wired (DSL) broadband speed is less than 10 Mbps /1 Mbps.

Your input in the “Explain” box should be specific to your address and your broadband access in Sharps Chapel. **Example input for residents of the local Sharps Chapel Community, Norris Shores, Sunset Bay, Elected Officials or concerned citizens is at the end of this document.**

6. If you have any letters of support of other supporting documentation you can link/add that to your input.
7. Once done, just click the “Submit Form” icon and you are all finished.

\* After you have submitted your comment, please forward this community support request by email or through a Facebook Tag to 10 friends in Union County that will also provide public comment, especially any one you know who lives or works in Sharps Chapel.

\*\* In anticipation of the grant being funded, residents in Sharps Chapel will need to let Sunset Digital Communications know that they are interested in service by filling out a residential sign-up form at <https://www.sunset-fiber.com/residential/sign-up/>. This is not a commitment or a contract with Sunset Digital; it only shows you’re interested in being contacted if and when Sunset Digital receives grant funding to begin work in the Sharps Chapel community.

\*\*\* Tim Long from Sunset Digital will be addressing the Union County Commission on 10 December, 7 PM, Courthouse, and you are invited to attend, show support and ask questions.

**Example input for the general Sharps Chapel Community:**

I strongly support the grant application “*Sharps Chapel Broadband Project*” by Sunset Digital Communications. Sharps Chapel is an unincorporated community in Union County with just over 1,500 residents. The Sharps Chapel peninsula is bounded to the north by the Powell River and to the south by the Clinch River. The only terrestrial broadband internet service available in some areas of Sharps Chapel is an antiquated ADSL service.

My current service is [examples include - Century Link, dishNET, VSAT, HughesNet] and a recent speed test indicated a [your speed test results – for example - 80 ms Ping, 7.09 Mbps Download Speed and 0.67 Mbps Upload Speed]. However, the service speeds are frequently much slower than that, and the service often drops out entirely.

Or:

I currently do not have terrestrial broadband service available at my residence/business.

Broadband is important to the Sharps Chapel community. The area is physically isolated and high quality internet would often mitigate the long travel times to regional cities such as Knoxville. Many areas have no effective broadband service whatsoever. Kids cannot complete homework at home, home based businesses suffer, public safety is threatened, residential and tourism development is stymied, and agricultural and other economic development is impaired.

Without state grant funding support, there is no hope that high speed broadband will be deployed in this underserved area of our county. No business or home in Union County has direct access to a fiber optic broadband connection which Sunset Digital will be offering rural residents, community institutions and businesses as part of the provided service package. Additionally, existing obsolete ADSL networks in Sharps Chapel are at capacity and new residents in certain areas are without options for terrestrial broadband service.

**Example input for the Norris Shores Community:**

I strongly support the grant application “*Sharps Chapel Broadband Project*” by Sunset Digital Communications. I live in Norris Shores, a lakeside community containing 417 lots with about 200 existing homes. My current service is the fastest available at my home/business and is defined by the provider as 10 Mbps download and 0.865 Mbps upload. I have never gotten that level of service. A recent speed test indicated [your speed test results – for example - 80 ms Ping, 7.09 Mbps Download Speed and 0.67 Mbps Upload Speed]. Also, the service drops out frequently.

Broadband is important to the Sharps Chapel community. The area is physically isolated and high quality internet would mitigate the long travel times to regional cities such as Knoxville. Many areas have no effective broadband service whatsoever. Kids cannot complete homework at home, home based businesses suffer, public safety is threatened, residential and tourism development is stymied, and agricultural and other economic development is impaired.

Without state grant funding support, there is no hope that high speed broadband will be deployed in the underserved areas of our county. No business or home in Union County has direct access to a fiber optic broadband connection which Sunset Digital will be offering rural residents, community institutions and businesses as part of the provided service package. Additionally, existing obsolete ADSL networks in Sharps Chapel are at capacity and new residents in certain areas are without options for terrestrial broadband service.

**Example input for the Sunset Bay Community:**

I strongly support the grant application “*Sharps Chapel Broadband Project*” by Sunset Digital Communications. I live in Sunset Bay, a rural lakeside neighborhood community in Sharps Chapel containing 784 homesites with 130 existing homes and an additional 18 currently under construction. The only terrestrial internet service available in the Sunset Bay neighborhood community is an antiquated, low speed ADSL service.

I currently subscribe to the fastest available service offered at my home/business. The service is an ADSL-based system, the only terrestrial internet service option available to Sunset Bay. The recent speed test I conducted, using Speedtest.net, indicated [your speed test results – for example - 80 ms Ping, 7.09 Mbps Download Speed and 0.67 Mbps Upload Speed]. However, the service speeds are frequently much slower than that, and the service often drops out entirely.

Broadband is important to our community. Our kids cannot complete homework at home, our home-based businesses are suffering, public safety is threatened, residential settlement is stymied, and agricultural and other economic development is impaired.

Without state grant funding support, there is no hope that Broadband will be deployed in the underserved areas of Union County, including Sunset Bay in Sharps Chapel. It is also important to note that no business or home in Union County has direct access to a fiber optic broadband connection which Sunset Digital will be offering all rural residents, Community Institutions and businesses as part of the provided service package. Additionally, existing dated ADSL networks in Sharps Chapel are beyond capacity and new residents in Sunset Bay are routinely being told that they are without options for terrestrial broadband service.



**Example input for Elected Officials:**

I strongly support the grant application “*Sharps Chapel Broadband Project*” by Sunset Digital Communications. Sharps Chapel is an unincorporated community in Union County with just over 1,500 residents. The Sharps Chapel peninsula is bounded to the north by the Powell and to the south by the Clinch River. The only terrestrial broadband internet service available in some areas of Sharps Chapel is an antiquated ADSL service.

The Sharps Chapel community is primarily agrarian, but is also home to Norris Shores and Sunset Bay, rural lakeside neighborhood communities, Lakeview Marina & Campground and Chuck Swan State Forest/Chuck Swan Wildlife Management Area.

Recognizing that place based economic investment is fundamental to Union County’s economic future, having next generation fiber optic communications available to the Sharps Chapel Community is essential. Chuck Swan State Forest is one of the most underused forests in East Tennessee; there are 25,000 acres that comprise the Chuck Swan Wildlife Management Area. A lack of available broadband is the primary reason behind over 875 empty home sites in the lake side communities of Norris Shores and Sunset Bay. If these sites were occupied, it would generate over \$1M annually in property tax revenue for the county.

Union County citizens recognize that access to next generation fiber optic broadband is the most important investments in Union County to bring jobs and prosperity. The negative impact of a lack of Broadband in Union County is significant; students who can’t pursue on-line training, inability to attract high paying knowledge workers, inability to telecommute, a depressed housing market, and the inability to attract new business or grow existing businesses.

With financial assistance through the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant and investment by Sunset Digital Communications, Union County can grow our knowledge worker base, improve our educational status and participate in Tennessee’s and the nation’s economic expansion.

Without state grant funding support, there is no hope that Broadband will be deployed in the underserved areas of Union County to include the Sharps Chapel Community.

**Example input for other community members:**

I strongly support the grant application “*Sharps Chapel Broadband Project*” by Sunset Digital Communications. Sharps Chapel is an unincorporated community in Union County with just over 1,500 residents. The Sharps Chapel peninsula is bounded to the north by the Powell River and to the south by the Clinch River. Like many areas of Union County, the only terrestrial broadband internet service available in Sharps Chapel is an antiquated ADSL service.

Union County is the only county in Tennessee to have Broadband Ready Community Resolutions unanimously passed by the counties governing body and each county municipality, Maynardville, Plainview and Luttrell. Union County citizens have submitted hundreds of support letters, e-mails and requests for service to Sunset Digital. Union County businesses, homeowners associations, and individuals along with the Union County Business and Professional Association have made commitments of matching funds to Sunset Digital should the grant be approved by the Tennessee Department of Community and Economic Development. Letters of support for this grant have been submitted by the Knoxville Utilities Board and Powell Valley Electric Cooperative.

This unprecedented outpouring of support is a result of the desire and recognition that there is no greater need for Broadband in Tennessee than in rural Union County. County residents also recognize that Sunset Digital is hard at work in Claiborne and Hancock County, and individuals in those counties have uniformly expressed their overwhelming satisfaction with the service provided by Sunset Digital’s next generation fiber to home/business broadband network.

Without state grant funding support, there is no hope that Broadband will be deployed in the underserved areas of our County. It is also important to note that no business or home in Union County has direct access to a fiber optic broadband connection which Sunset Digital will be offering rural residents, Community Institutions and businesses as part of the provided service package. Additionally, existing dated DSL networks are beyond capacity and new residents in certain areas are without options for terrestrial broadband service. It is also important to note that Union County is unique in that three electric utilities serve the county, none of which have expressed interest in providing telecommunications services, and only providers like Sunset Digital are able to bridge the gap and provide modern fiber optic communications capability to county residents.

For rural counties, having high-speed Internet is a critical factor in growth and prosperity. Multiple studies have shown that increased Internet access, in particular access to next generation fiber optic broadband, has a positive effect on employment and economic growth; that’s why rural broadband is so critical to our state’s future and the future of our rural communities. It is important to note that Union County has not participated in the expansive economic revival ongoing in Tennessee.

- From 2007 to 2012, farm income declined by 20% in Union County and the number of farms declined by 17%.

- Union County is one of only 6 counties in the state of Tennessee to not have a jobs announcement under the 8 years of economic expansion in Tennessee.
- Union County is one of the nation's most economically depressed rural counties with the 2017 Distressed Communities Index classifying Union County in the bottom 6.7 % of all counties with a negative 7.5 % business growth and an overall distress score of 93.3.
- Union County is one of only three counties in the state of Tennessee where the school system and county government are the number one and two employers.
- Union County has only 13 % of residents who both work and live in the same city compared to the Tennessee average of 57 % of people who both work and live in the same city.
- According to the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research, Union County is experiencing population decline including out-migration, mainly among 20 – 29 year olds, that began in 2011; a marked reversal of the 30 % population growth rate observed from 1990 to 2000. Without intervention the population decline is expected to extend beyond 2040.
- Union County's negative population growth and out-migration brings with it severe negative economic consequences including fewer workers available to businesses, fewer customers to buy their goods and services, and a shrinking tax base all resulting in a severe impact on the finances of government.

Union County citizens recognize that one of the most important investments in Union County to bring jobs and prosperity is access to next generation fiber optic broadband. The negative impact of a lack of Broadband in Union County is significant; students who can't pursue on line training, inability to attract high paying knowledge workers, inability to telecommute, a depressed housing market, and the inability to attract new business or grow existing businesses.

With financial assistance through the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant and investment by Sunset Digital Communications, Union County can grow our knowledge worker base, improve our educational status and participate in Tennessee's and the nation's economic expansion.