



Sunset Digital Communications
333 Fraley Ave.
Duffield, VA 24244

Attn: Joseph Puckett

As a citizen of Union County, I strongly support the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant application being proposed by Sunset Digital Communications. There is no greater need for Broadband in Tennessee than in rural Union County and without state grant funding support, there is no hope that Broadband will be deployed in the underserved areas of the County. It is also important to note that no one in Union County has 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.

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 expanded Broadband access. Broadband access directly correlates to economic viability and vitality and is fundamental to the county's economic future. Access to Broadband would greatly benefit our community and improve the lives of our residents by:

- (Agriculture) Growth areas in Tennessee Agriculture are sales of agricultural products directly to consumers and nontraditional agriculture ventures. Direct sales are important as farmers receive only 15 cents of every food dollar that shoppers spend at traditional food outlets. Both direct sales and nontraditional agricultural ventures require access to high speed broadband services for success.
- (Education) Being able to provide "at-home" classroom technology would allow our residents to complete distance education courses that are currently unavailable and assist current students.
- (Health) Having access to e-health information or telemedicine service will reduce the number of individuals whose treatable conditions worsen due to limited access to physical medical infrastructure.
- (Public Safety) A digital communication infrastructure will help first responders and law enforcement to better respond to emergencies in our hard-to-reach rural locations.
- (Economy) High-speed internet improves the ability of our residents to support themselves through entrepreneurial activities and brings efficiencies to our existing industries to help these industries grow. This will provide jobs for our residents and increase income levels.

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, the loss of million dollar real estate deals, 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. We realize, that to compete in today's global marketplace, we must remove the infrastructure gaps in our rural communities.

There is broad community support for expanded Broadband access in Union County and I strongly support this Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Grant application by Sunset Digital.

Thank You,