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Politico

The Crawford County Planning Commission is seeking public input as it develops a plan to increase broadband internet access within the county. "The importance of high-speed Internet access to underserved communities in Crawford County cannot be overstated," Crawford County Planning Director Zach Norwood said. "This was already a priority issue for our area, but the effects of COVID really amplified how critical it is for business, residents and our local schools to have a reliable internet connection."

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has set a download speed of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speed of 3 Mbps as the standard for determining what is high-speed broadband. Crawford County has only 75 percent of households having access to internet service that meets the FCC standard, according to a September 2020 study by the Pennsylvania General Assembly on the Delivery of High-Speed Broadband Services in Underserved Areas.

Currently, the commission's Planning Initiatives Committee is gathering information on broadband efforts in neighboring counties, logistics requirements for broadband and possible funding opportunities. The pandemic

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pennsylvanians are crossing the Ohio border for COVID-19 shots

Philadelphia Inquirer

Why Joe Biden is pitching his infrastructure plan in Pittsburgh, where he launched and ended his campaign

caused school districts around Crawford County to shift to using the internet for classes while businesses of all types and medical facilities also used remote access. It has highlighted the reality that those living in rural areas without high-speed internet access are at a disadvantage to those with high-speed internet.

The public interested in the county's broadband planning initiative should contact the committee by Friday through the Crawford County Planning Commission's webpage at crawfordcountypa.net/planning where there is a survey form about broadband. People should include details on their interest in the initiative, ways in which they can support the efforts, and, if known, information on other broadband-related projects affecting the county. Additionally, the public may view an online "story map" on the project also at crawfordcountypa.net/planning. – **Meadville (Crawford Co.) Tribune**

All the gold in California isn't in Beverly Hills banks. Some of it is in the FCC's multi-billion-dollar rural broadband subsidy fund.

Rural residents in California got the most money for broadband in the FCC's recent Rural Digital Opportunities Fund (RDOF) auction at \$830 per resident, while Rhode Island got the least with only \$9. That is according to Satelliteinternet.com, which [analyzed Phase 1](#) of the fund outlay comparing FCC dollar figures with Census Bureau data on residents in general and rural residents in particular given that it is a rural broadband subsidy program.

West Virginia was second most at \$530, followed by Arkansas with \$377, Minnesota with \$328, and Massachusetts with \$327. Among the lowest, New Jersey was second at \$13 per rural resident, Connecticut third least at \$23, followed by New Hampshire with \$50 per rural resident and North Dakota, \$53.

The FCC has said that winning bidders in its RDOF Phase I auction have the money to deploy high-speed broadband to more than 5.2 million unserved homes/businesses (5,220,833 to be specific), which it said was almost 99% of the available locations in the auction. The auction allocated \$9.2 billion for rural broadband buildouts over the next 10 years. It has buildout requirements, including reaching all assigned locations completed by the end of year six, but incentives to build out all locations ASAP.

While service of at least the FCC's 25 mbps upstream/3 mbps downstream high speed definition was eligible for the money, the FCC prioritized bids for higher speeds and lower latency. Somewhat surprisingly, North Dakota got some of the least funding per rural resident--\$53.73--even though almost 40% of the state's population is rural.

The analysis found that Maryland ranks as one of the states with the least funding per resident (rural and non-rural), even though one in four of those residents lacks a home wireline broadband connection, with African Americans representing 40% of those unconnected households. South Dakota, which has some of the slowest average internet speeds, says Satellite Internet, and a large rural population, ranks among the lowest in overall funding. The national average for funding per resident (rural and nonrural) was \$37.03.

Top 10 funded states – funding per rural resident: California: \$830; West Virginia: \$530; Arkansas: \$377; Minnesota: \$328; Massachusetts: \$327; Mississippi: \$313; **Pennsylvania: \$254**; Wisconsin: \$248; Michigan: \$201; Illinois: \$205

Least funded states – funding per rural resident: Rhode Island: \$9; New Jersey: \$13; Connecticut: \$23; New Hampshire: \$50; North Dakota: \$53; Delaware: \$73; Vermont: \$80; Hawaii: \$90; Utah: \$93.30; Texas: \$117. – **Next TV**

Five months after the state's narrow and bitterly contested presidential race drew Republican claims of improper election procedures, it's clear no changes will be enacted in time for Pennsylvania's spring primary election.

The GOP majorities in both legislative chambers have convened a series of hearings on election law and more are scheduled, but counties are preparing to run the May 18 primary election under the same rules as in November. County elections officials will have to keep waiting for a long-sought change to add a pre-election period to process absentee and mail-in ballots. The counting bottleneck in November meant that the state's winner, Joe Biden, did not declare victory until the Saturday after Election Day. "The intent was never to hit the May primary, it was impossible to do that," said Rep. Seth Grove, R-York, who as chair of the State Government Committee has overseen House hearings, with three remaining.

Grove said his goal remains to get "election law done in time for the General Election." Grove said he wants to complete a comprehensive look at the entire voting process before lawmakers determine which changes to state election law are warranted. Priorities include "a better election timeline and standardization and uniformity," and that the state Supreme Court should not be "making policy," Grove said. "We want all the information before we make any decisions," Grove said.

Wanda Murren, spokesperson for the Department of State, said pre-cavassing legislation remains a priority for Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf's administration and for the county agencies that run the nuts and bolts of voting and counting the results. "While the November 2020 election went exceedingly well, the delay in counting mail ballots and arriving at election outcomes provided an environment in which a false narrative was allowed to proliferate," Murren said. "Carrying out pre-cavassing of ballots in public settings is a common-sense solution supported by election officials of all parties."

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania supports more time to prepare mail-in ballots and wants more uniformity, said executive director Lisa Schaefer. Under the new no-excuse absentee ballot law in the state, there were inconsistent practices on contacting voters to fix problems with absentee ballots and in the use of secure boxes where voters could drop off the ballots. There was also a slew of litigation from then-President Donald Trump and the GOP. "You saw the different counties reading the law differently and we didn't want that to happen," Schaefer said.

The commissioners association also supports moving the deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot from seven days before the election, as is currently the law, to 15 days before, which would match the voter registration deadline. Lycoming County elections director Forrest Lehman said the Legislature's failure to act on pre-cavassing and other changes to improve procedures is a factor in a string of county elections chiefs quitting in the past year and a half. "I don't know of a clearer signal to the governor and the Legislature that the way we're running elections in Pennsylvania is not sustainable," Lehman said.

Schaefer said she hopes the General Assembly and Wolf can agree on revisions before lawmakers break for the summer at the start of July, so that counties won't be rushed to adopt and adapt to changes in the month or two before the Nov. 2 election. – **Associated Press**



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