

FREDERICK CONTINUES BROADBAND EFFORT

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WINCHESTER — Local residents who want to give input on broadband Internet services in Frederick County have until May 3 to participate in an ongoing survey.

So far, 456 people have participated in the Information Technology office's survey — which aims to collect data on broadband speeds and availability around the county — according to IT director Walter Banks.

About 300 Frederick County residents and businesses participated in a similar survey conducted last year.

The county is partnering with the Herndon-based Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) to formulate a plan to bring different broadband providers into the area and stimulate existing local providers, according to Banks.

Sandie Terry, broadband program manager with the CIT, said via a video conference connection at a media event Tuesday that she will interpret the data collected during the survey and present it to the public in June.

"This is for the community, so this is an opportunity for the community to put their voice forward," Terry said. "And it's just critical when Frederick County and the city of Winchester are planning how they're going to go about reaching the underserved areas, it's important to get that from the community."

The county determined from last year's survey that Gore, Shawneeland, Star Tannery and Mountain Falls are the primary areas underserved by Internet providers.

Alissa Scott, with the county's IT office, said some of the reasons broadband service needs to be improved in rural areas is because it can improve emergency communications as well as enhancing education opportunities.

Once the CIT goes over the survey's results and presents its findings to the county, the IT office will look at ways to move forward with local Internet providers to increase the availability of broadband in rural areas, said Patrick Fly, the county's geographic information systems manager.

"The feedback is really important for us to understand what's out there and what's going on and how people feel about [their Internet service]," he said.

Representatives of several local Internet providers also were on hand Tuesday to discuss how their companies work to bring service to rural areas.

The providers — Visual Link Internet, Wave2Net, Winchester Wireless, VibeVoip and NOVECnet — each have displays set up in the IT office for local residents to see how their connection speed compares to what they currently have at their home or business.

The IT office is on the first floor of the Frederick County Administration Building.

NOVECnet, the Internet-providing subsidiary of Manassas-based NOVEC Energy Solutions Inc., set up an iPad for local residents to use for testing the company's satellite Internet speed in February.

Chris Hild, director of operations NOVECnet, said between 10 and 15 Frederick County residents have become customers after using the display in the IT office.

Information on the broadband survey is available online at www.co.frederick.va.us/broadband_new.aspx, or by calling the IT office at .

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