



**LaPorte County
Rural Broadband
Task Force**

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LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force Spotlights Successes and Planned Expansion

****LPC Broadband Task Force, Hosted Public Workshop****

(La Porte County, IN): The La Porte County Rural Broadband Task Force (LPCRBTF) has hosted its first community workshop to discuss the state of broadband within La Porte County.

“When I selected this powerful Blue-Ribbon Committee of community experts and innovative thinkers, I knew we would benefit most from having these key people at the table to make big things happen for LaPorte County. The leaders you see on this Task Force deserve our gratitude because they have volunteered their time, and their expertise to help our county tackle the enormous and complex issue of much-needed broadband expansion,” stated Sheila Matias, LaPorte County Commission President and Co-Founder of the LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force.

Matias continued, “This Task Force rolled up its sleeves and went to work immediately; we hosted dozens of industry experts to share best practices and strategies to assist LaPorte County. We then planned our approach to expand and serve our more rural residents, our critically important agribusinesses, our educational institutions as well as the residents not yet fully served. Since conception, the task force has worked to survey residents, create a “fiber to the premise” plan, lobbied our internet service providers (ISP’s) to put fiber in hard- to- reach county areas; we formed a county- wide school consortium, and assisted ISPs with grant preparation to help bridge the gap in funding. We met with state and federal legislators to help them understand and hear the real facts about La Porte County’s broadband story, completed the process to become a state-certified “Broadband Ready Community”, and have successfully helped get additional fiber in the ground for La Porte County residents,” Commissioner Matias concluded.



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Representative Patricia Boy, State of Indiana
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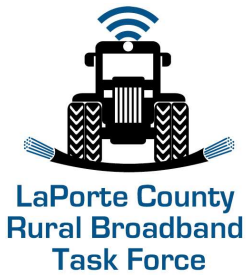
LaPorte County Commissioner, **President,** Sheila Brillson Matias, Task Force Chair
LaPorte County Office of Community and Economic Development Director, Tony Rodriguez, Facilitator

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ISPs like COMCAST, ACME, Surf Internet and others has been a vital partner in this endeavor.

Surf Internet is one of the service providers working closely with county officials to help execute the master plan. "Over two decades ago, Surf helped pioneer the delivery of high-speed internet to rural La Porte County. Today, we are thrilled to continue our innovation in the county by deploying transformational fiber-optic broadband technology," said Surf CEO Gene Crusie. "In addition to grant dollars received from the state, Surf has invested over \$16M in LaPorte county to date, and through the grant and other projects intends to invest at least an additional \$10M of its own money to ensure La Porte County residents gain access to a fast, reliable connection that is capable of reshaping economic and educational futures," Crusie added.

"LaPorte County is the second largest land area county in Indiana and we knew we had our work cut out for us; however, between the LaPorte County Farm Bureau, the Task Force Members, the County's GIS department and fine companies like SURF Internet, Comcast, ACME Communications, and, our success has truly just begun to pay dividends. Securing the States' First Broadband Ready Communities designation in 2022 and then getting approved for the Next Level Connect Grant, we knew this was going to be a game changer for LaPorte County," stated Tony Rodriguez, Dir. Office of Community & Economic Development.

"Comcast Connects LaPorte County and the rest of Northern Indiana via its more than 10,000 miles of network infrastructure in the area, including 2,200 miles of fiber, residential Internet speeds up to 6 Gbps, and 150,000 Wi-Fi hotspots," said Debra Piscola, Comcast's regional senior director of Government Affairs. "We're excited to partner with LaPorte County to expand access to high-speed Internet service to even more local households and businesses and close the digital divide."

"We are extremely pleased to be working closely with the Task Force and the County to close the gap on the most difficult to serve residents, businesses and farmers. We had an opportunity to solve a very challenging not for profit customer buildout and the LaPorte County Rural Broadband Task Force through Commissioner Matias, and the OCED office assisted in presenting to the County Commissioners and ultimately the LaPorte County Council whom approved our project unanimously. This says everything, LaPorte County has clearly put a priority on their people's needs and the future of communications," stated Bill Ritchey, President, CEO of ACME Communications, Inc.

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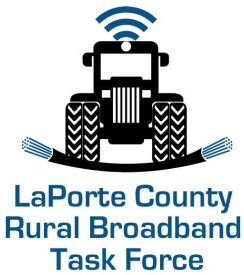
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In June of this year the State of Indiana’s Office of Community and Rural Affairs approved three of the County’s ISPs in the Next Level Connect, round 3 funding, a highly competitive unserved and underserved buildout assistance program that will help ISP’s make huge strides in expanding broadband to large numbers of our residents who are currently without stable connectivity.

Today’s community meeting workshop gave firms the opportunity to spotlight the coverage enhancements.

“We are very pleased to be a collaborative partner with this innovative Broadband Task Force. Today’s event shines a bright light on the importance of working together to solve Rural Indiana’s Broadband connectivity challenges. Our Speed Survey efforts truly are allowing us to add real value to the process. For more information and to take the Speed test Survey go to **www.infb.org/speedtest**” stated Marissa Mikkell, Regional Manager, Indiana Farm Bureau.

To become more involved in LaPorte County’s Rural Broadband Task Force and for more information about the task force, please contact Tony Rodriguez, Dir. Community & Economic Development, at 219-877-8830 or at trodriquez@laportecounty.org.

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