

Franklin County Water Service Authority

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February 3, 2021

TO: Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA)

RE: Support for Tombigbee Electric Cooperative/Communications
(Tombigbee) applications for Broadband Grants

Besides our primary responsibility, the Franklin County Water Service Authority (FCWSA) is charged with providing Franklin County broadband internet service for residential, commercial or industrial purposes pursuant to the Constitution of Alabama, Amendment 518, as amended in 2014.

Reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service is a critical utility for rural Franklin County, our children's education, e-health services, work-from-home, e-commerce and our county's growth and economic development. The COVID-19 pandemic only reinforces this critical utility need.

The recent FCC RDOF auction was, **we thought**, the best opportunity for our unserved and underserved rural county residents to gain a lifeline to reliable affordable fiber optic broadband service. FCWSA worked hard to find partners with a successful track record of providing reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service as well as having a strong loyal commitment to **every rural county resident**.

In fact, we secured such an arrangement with Tombigbee Electric Cooperative/Communications (Tombigbee), a neighboring county electric cooperative service provider that met those exact qualifications.

In that arrangement, **every** Franklin (County) Electric Cooperative (FEC) member would have been offered reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service. As Tombigbee was already building-out such a service in most of the southern portions of our county, these FEC members would have had service in two (2) to three (3) years.

Additionally, **and because they know and understand the rural customer** well, Tombigbee offered two (2) price points. An entry level price assuring every rural resident could afford internet and an upgrade, for those needing higher speeds.

FCWSA, and Franklin County rural residents, were **devastatingly disappointed** to learn that a large commercial service provider who has serviced very small portions of Franklin County for decades and showed no interest in servicing the rural portions of our county, won the majority of rural Franklin County census blocks in the recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) with low-ball or predatory bids for those census blocks.

In doing so, this large commercial service provider “locked-up” these census blocks for up to ten (10) years, blocking service providers such as Tombigbee from bringing **reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service in two (2) to (3) three years to every FEC member.**

When FCWSA and our rural county residents learned of the ADECA grants eligible to Tombigbee, we were extremely grateful and appreciative of a second opportunity to bring reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service in two (2) to (3) three years to every FEC member. Our prayers were answered.

FCWSA understands Tombigbee’s current ADECA applications do not cover the entire unserved or under-served portions of rural Franklin County. However, they do cover large portions of the county, a healthy long over-due start for our rural Franklin County residents.

Further, along with FCWSA and FEC as well as our motivated rural citizens and businesses, we will work closely with Tombigbee on our mutual strong committed goal to provide **reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service in two (2) to (3) three years to every FEC member.**

Accordingly, FCWSA gives its **unequivocal full support and recommendation to Tombigbee’s** ADECA grant applications to provide reliable affordable last-mile fiber optic broadband service to those Franklin County areas covered by those applications.

Please approve these applications quickly. Time is of the essence. Our rural residents are, literally, needing this service yesterday. Feel free to contact us should you have any questions.

The Franklin County Water Service Authority:

Randy Schultz, Chairman,
(CPA (Retired), CIA)

Alan Rhudy, Vice Chairman,
(Vice President, Community Spirit Bank)

Scott A. Mugno,
Secretary/Treasurer,
(JD, Vice President, FedEx, Retired)

Lesley Cantrell, Member,
(Quality Assurance Manager, TRU Homes River Birch)

Michael Hughes, Member,
(Geographic Information Systems Manager, Franklin County)

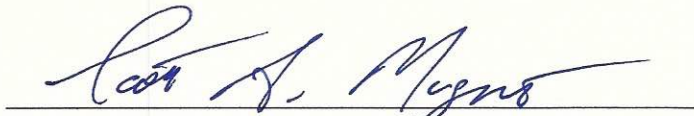
Kenny Hurst, Member,
(Vice President, Valley State Bank)

JT Lawler, Member,
(Southeast Territory Manager, FPEC Corporation)

FOR the Franklin County Water Service Authority:



Randy Schultz, Chairman



Scott A. Mugno, Secretary/Treasurer