

May 14, 2021

Mr. Jim Stritzinger
Broadband Project Administrator
State of South Carolina
Office of Regulatory Staff
1401 Main Street, Suite 900
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Mr. Stritzinger:

Comporium is committed to bridging the digital divide within Orangeburg County. We are excited to respond to the South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Program application.

Please review the attached application which shares all the details. We are extremely excited about this project and look forward to the opportunity to work together as a partner and achieve success together. If you need clarification or further information concerning the application, please do not hesitate to contact me at greg.lunsford@comporium.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Charles G. Lunsford'.

Charles G. Lunsford
Vice President – Regulatory Affairs

Attachment



APPLICATION

South Carolina 2021 Rural Broadband Grant Program

Applicant Information

Applicant Name/Organization **PBT Communications, Inc.**

Applicant FCC Registration Number (FRN) **0003-7177-25**

Primary Contact Name **Chris Moody**

Title **Regulatory Cost Analyst**

Mailing Address **330 East Black Street**

Phone Number **803-326-7255**

City, State, Zip **Rock Hill, SC 29730**

Email **chris.moody@comporium.com**

Broadband Service Provider Experience

Date of Applicant's Initial FCC Form 477 Submission **09/01/2000**

Date of Applicant's Most Recent FCC Form 477 Submission **04/02/2021**

Applicant and/or Project Partner has Experience:

- Delivering broadband service via fiber and/or hybrid fiber-coax infrastructure
- Delivering broadband service via fixed wireless infrastructure
- Building and operating broadband networks in rural areas
- Operating broadband networks in low-moderate income areas

Project Area Information

Eligible County Impact

Counties
(list) Orangeburg

Cities/Towns/Municipalities
(list) North

Households **589**

Businesses **43**

Health Care Facilities **0**

Community Anchor Institutions **1**

Educational Institutions **3**

Contiguous County Impact

Counties
(list)

Cities/Towns/Municipalities
(list)

Households

Businesses

Health Care Facilities

Community Anchor Institutions

Educational Institutions

Broadband Infrastructure Information

Indicate the type(s) of broadband infrastructure technology to be deployed in the project area.

- Fiber to the Premises* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds 1000/1000
- Hybrid fiber-coax (symmetrical upload/download speeds)* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds
- Hybrid fiber-coax (non-symmetrical upload/download speeds)* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds
- Fixed wireless* Minimum Sustainable Download/Upload Speeds

Broadband Pricing Schedules or Tiers

Indicate all rate tiers for wireline projects of at least 100/20 Mbps or fixed wireless at 50/5 Mbps or faster that will be offered to customers in the project area:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rates less than \$10/month | <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$20 - \$24.99/month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$10 - \$14.99/month | <input type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$25 - \$34.99/month |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rates between \$15 - \$19.99/month | |

Project Timeline

Project Start Date 07/01/2021	Customer Premises
Project Construction Activity Begins 10/01/2021	<i>Installations Begin</i> 06/30/2022
Project Construction Activity Complete 09/30/2022	<i>Installations End</i> 10/31/2022
	Overall Project Completion Date 10/31/2022

Project Cost Information

Total Project Cost \$2,537,480	Average Cost per Location Served <i>(all locations or structures)</i> \$4,015
Upfront Cost Requirements \$0	
Cost of Building and/or Extending Infrastructure to Customer Premises \$2,537,480	Average Cost per Housing Unit \$4,015
	Average Cost per Business \$4,015

Project Funding Information

South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Program Funds requested (\$) \$1,268,740

Applicant-Provided Funding (\$) \$1,268,740

Non-Public Funding

Amount (\$)

Source(s)

Additional Information

- 1) Describe Applicant's and/or project Partner's experience building and/or operating broadband networks.

Please see attached .pdf file.

- 2) Describe how your proposal meets the needs of the community to be served as described in the "Guidelines."

Please see attached .pdf file.

- 3) Describe any plans or programs you have developed to improve adoption in the community described in this proposal. Please include letters of support from key community partners that indicate their awareness of your project.

Please see attached .pdf file.

- 4) Provide documents that demonstrate your organization currently has the necessary funds (50% of total project cost) to complete this project/proposal. List documents here and attach documents to this proposal.

See attached bank letter.

- 5) List any lease, franchise agreement, interconnection agreement, authorization, permit, or other items needed to complete this project.

County Road Permits and/or SC Highway Permits will be obtained prior to construction being performed.

Attachments and Exhibits

Please attach the following items to application:

- Map of project area (*PDF and Shapefile formats*)
- Letters of support evidencing community need and strategic partnerships
- Any additional information evidencing community need for project
- Most recent FCC Form 477 filing

Certification and Signature

CERTIFICATION: The Applicant certifies that information included in this application is factual to their knowledge.

Signature:



Print Name of Signatory: Charles G. Lunsford

Title of Signatory: Vice President - Regulatory Affairs

Date: 05/14/2021

All questions and completed applications should be submitted to Broadband@ORS.SC.GOV

Facsimile signatures and email signatures shall be as effective as original signatures to bind any party.



North Application Questions

1) Describe Applicant's and/or project Partner's experience building and/or operating broadband network

PBT Communications, Inc. provides local telephone service, security, broadband, and cable television to residential and business customers located in portions of Aiken, Lexington, Orangeburg, Saluda, and Richland Counties in South Carolina. PBT Communications is a subsidiary CLEC of Comporium, Inc. PBT Communications offers Digital Subscriber Line, Coax, and Fiber-To-The-Home (FTTH) to both residential and business customers. DSL has three speed tiers to choose from: Standard (7Mbps/1Mbps), Ultra (9Mbps/1Mbps), and Elite (11Mbps/1Mbps). Coax has three speed tiers: Standard (12Mbps x 1.5 Mbps), Ultra (25 Mbps x 3 Mbps), and Elite (50Mbps x 5Mbps). The FTTH product has four speed tiers: Standard (300Mbps/300Mbps), Ultra(600Mbps/600Mbps), Elite (750Mbps/750Mbps) and Zipstream (1GB/1GB.)

PBT Communications offers Metro Ethernet services that provide customers a redundant and secure way to transfer mission-critical data. PBT Communications' Metro Ethernet service is a high-speed (10 Mbps to 10 Gbps) packet-based service that provides the transmission of point-to-point LAN or WAN data between a customer's locations. Metro Ethernet circuits can also be ordered to provide dedicated bandwidth to the internet. Our Customer Network Operations Center offers technical support with proactive network monitoring of customer's Metro Ethernet circuits to ensure consistent, high-level performance. PBT Communications MPLS core network provides diverse and redundant IP routing that supports all of the customer facing services.

PBT Communications also operates a remote switch and has connections to Comporium, Inc. or one of its sister companies who provide equipment to operate voice, data, and video networks. PBT Communications has been deploying FTTH networks since 2005. The PBT Communications remote switch homes to the Comporium, Inc. owned Rock Hill Class 5 Switch. The voice traffic from the remotes and all the data and video utilizes the redundant fiber connections to the Rock Hill host switch, core broadband network, and video headend. The Comporium, Inc. network connects the voice and data traffic to the world. Leveraging these assets at the parent company level provides some economies of scale to PBT Communications. PBT Communications has one large business office in Gilbert, SC for its customers to purchase services from. Customers can come into the business office to provision service, pay bills, or ask questions to available service representatives. PBT Communications has a plant work center location that houses Installation and Repair groups, along with Facilities and Construction also operate out of this location.

Question 2) Describe how your proposal meets the needs of the community to be served as described in the "Guidelines."

Orangeburg County is located 51 miles south of Columbia, South Carolina. The county land area covers 1,128 square miles and has an estimated population of 86,175. Orangeburg, the largest incorporated municipality is the county seat with a population of 12,654. The county has 16 other smaller towns with populations that have less than 1,500 citizens. The local economy within the county is mostly agriculture focused in the areas of cotton, soybeans, corn, and turf grass. For the premise of this application, Comporium seeks to expand fiber within the town of North.

North Application Questions

North is located in the northwest corner of Orangeburg County. The total land area is roughly .86 square miles. The 2019 population is an estimated 708 citizens. North was once home to Stone Manufacturing Company. Stone was the largest employer in the town and specialized in the textile industry. As globalization of the textile industry evolved, Stone Manufacturing Company struggled to maintain a competitive advantage against overseas competitors. The plant eventually closed. Many employees had worked for the company for decades. The closing was detrimental to the local economy of North. Workers who had a specific skill set in textile manufacturing struggled to find similar jobs so geographically close to the community in which they had lived and worked for years. The economic impact is still being felt by those who worked there. Other areas of Orangeburg County are suffering due to plant closures. Mayer Industries, another textile manufacturer closed after 50 years of operation, with a loss of 59 jobs. Koyo Bearings also closed in March 2021, impacting 362 employees. Due to the lack of industry within North, and other rural areas of the county, employees commute to other areas to find work in the greater Columbia Metropolitan area. Orangeburg County has 9,644 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 244 deaths. Since the pandemic began many small businesses have closed and individuals have lost their jobs, creating further economic hardships for citizens in the region.

Orangeburg County has experienced many economic challenges in recent years. The current unemployment rate within the county is 7.8%. 2,704 people are currently depending on unemployment assistance. Aside to those people who are unemployed, 22,664 individuals are living in poverty or 26.3%. Individuals who have experienced hardships rely on broadband to communicate, apply for unemployment, and search for jobs. Extending fiber into the most remote areas of the county will greatly assist these individuals by increasing their overall quality of life, and to lift them out of poverty.

Additional broadband can also help combat childhood poverty. The current poverty rate in the Orangeburg County School District is 84.79%. By adding additional high-speed broadband, this will allow students to complete assignments from home, assist in virtual learning, and increase the overall learning experience. Students who attend school virtually will greatly benefit from upgrading the current DSL infrastructure. Since the maximum DSL speed available to students is 11Mbps/1Mbps, virtual learning may be a challenge. The RBGP funding will allow the DSL infrastructure to be upgraded to fiber, greatly alleviating the risk of students not being able to complete assignments on time. This upgraded technology will keep students on pace with other counterparts across other areas of the state and not be left behind.

Each day 19,464 employees leave Orangeburg County to work elsewhere. Broadband expansion into rural areas of the county could allow these individuals to work from home. This could also bolster economic development efforts for small businesses. Employees who used to commute to the Columbia metropolitan area would have the ability to spend money at local restaurants, gyms, barber shops, gas stations, and retail stores. These funds would otherwise be leaving Orangeburg County. Expanding fiber-based broadband access will make northwestern Orangeburg County more attractive to industry and facilitate economic development. Companies will be more enticed to re-locate to these areas knowing that high-speed broadband is available to residences and businesses.

North Application Questions

Due to the rurality of locations in North, delivering high speed internet with speeds of 25/3 has been challenging. Receiving South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Program funding would provide the company with the needed capital to deliver state-of-the-art fiber broadband to customers and businesses. Currently the broadband infrastructure in place that serves end user customers is Digital Subscriber Line, (DSL). DSL does not meet the 25/3 speed that is considered to be adequate broadband.

This proposal will provide five high speed fiber residential and four business speed tiers for customers to choose from:

Residential Broadband fiber offerings will consist of the following speeds and prices:

Fiber Residential Low-Moderate Income Package 100 Mbps x 20 Mbps = \$19.24

Fiber Residential Package 1 300 Mbps x 300 Mbps = \$69.94

Fiber Residential Package 2 600 Mbps x 600 Mbps = \$79.94

Fiber Residential Package 3 750 Mbps x 750 Mbps = \$89.94

Zipstream Residential 1000 Mbps x 1000 Mbps = \$99.94

Business Broadband fiber offerings for locations will consist of the following speeds and prices:

Fiber Business Package 1 300 Mbps x 300 Mbps = \$84.98

Fiber Business Package 2 600 Mbps x 600 Mbps = \$154.98

Fiber Business Package 3 750 Mbps x 750 Mbps = \$204.98

Zipstream Business 1000 Mbps x 1000 Mbps = \$299.99

To encourage broadband adoption, Comporium will create a new low/moderate income package with speeds of 100 Mbps x 20 Mbps. The price point is \$19.24. This will be available to qualifying customers who participate in Lifeline service. PBT Communications cannot offer Lifeline service because it is not an ETC. However, a customer who can provide proof they are participating in the Lifeline program can obtain this low cost offering. This new offering will help those in need during these difficult economic times.

A Wi-Fi access point will be installed at the North Town Pavilion in North, South Carolina. This will allow those in the area who are underserved to have broadband at no charge. Comporium is committed to working with the town of North to install this Wi-Fi access point for the benefit of the community.

Comporium understands how beneficial this improved broadband offering will be to the residences and businesses in the Project Area. Therefore, we are committed to working as fast as possible to deliver these services if we are awarded this RBGP Grant. We have seen extended material lead times over the past six months, but we will work with our suppliers to obtain the material required for these overbuilds as soon as practical.

The latest FCC 477 information has already been submitted to Jim Stritzinger. He asked that I put a note in the application regarding this.

North Application Questions

The company commits that it will serve all residences and businesses within the application areas on a non-discriminatory basis. All locations will be able to obtain necessary speeds defined by the Rural Broadband Grant Program.

Question 3) Describe any plans or programs you have developed to improve adoption in the community described in this proposal. Please include letters of support from key community partners that indicate their awareness of your project.

Community Adoption Strategy and Plan

PBT Communications is committed to assisting anyone in the proposed grant area with getting up to speed on digital literacy, especially those who have not previously had any Internet service and, as result, lack experience. PBT Communications plans to provide free Internet access at various community centers, public gathering locations, and community anchor institutions (CAIs), along with informational posters, to allow residents to experience the capabilities of the new broadband connectivity available to them. PBT Communications has committed to produce and distribute educational and promotional programs and materials to the community regarding their new broadband service. We also plan on organizing events within the community to raise awareness of the educational resources and opportunities found Online that will become available to them. The following actions will also be taken in these efforts:

Press Release: As soon as an award announcement has been finalized and signed by the ORS staff and the legal team of PBT Communications a press release will be issued to local media outlets in Orangeburg County. These types of media releases will be used first, to make residents and businesses aware of planned upgrades in underserved areas of the service territory.

Direct Phone Calls: PBT Communications will generate a list of residential and business locations within the polygons that have been identified as underserved. Outbound phone calls will be made by the automated IVR (interactive voice response) system to notify customers upgrades are coming to their area.

Email Marketing and Advertising Campaign: Current DSL customers of PBT Communications have an email address on file with the company. Comporium Marketing personnel will be able to compose an announcement email and send it directly to email addresses of residences and businesses who will benefit from the fiber expansion.

Direct Mail Postcards: PBT Communications will implement a direct mail campaign to target locations within the underserved polygon to make them aware of the upgrades. These postcards will notify current DSL customers that their area has been identified and will be upgraded with newer fiber technologies.

Community Engagement Events: PBT Communications will hold events at various locations in Orangeburg County. These events will be open to the public, so that customers can come ask questions to staff. PBT Communications will reach out to various homeowner association (HOA) groups to notify them when these events will take place. The HOA groups can then send an email broadcast out to all homeowners in subdivisions to make them aware of these events.

North Application Questions

Broadband User Training Plan

Comporium will strive to train new customers by holding classes at local business offices. The company will also train customers at community centers where we will provide free Wi-Fi. New broadband users will be able to visit the Comporium website for a thorough frequently asked questions section that can assist users. Training videos will also be posted on our website to help with basic broadband questions. Broadband technical support can assist users with any broadband related question that they may have. New broadband users will have the ability to call or chat with broadband technical support. One important factor regarding Comporium broadband technical support is that all employees are all in house. This service is not outsourced. All employees work and live in the service areas.

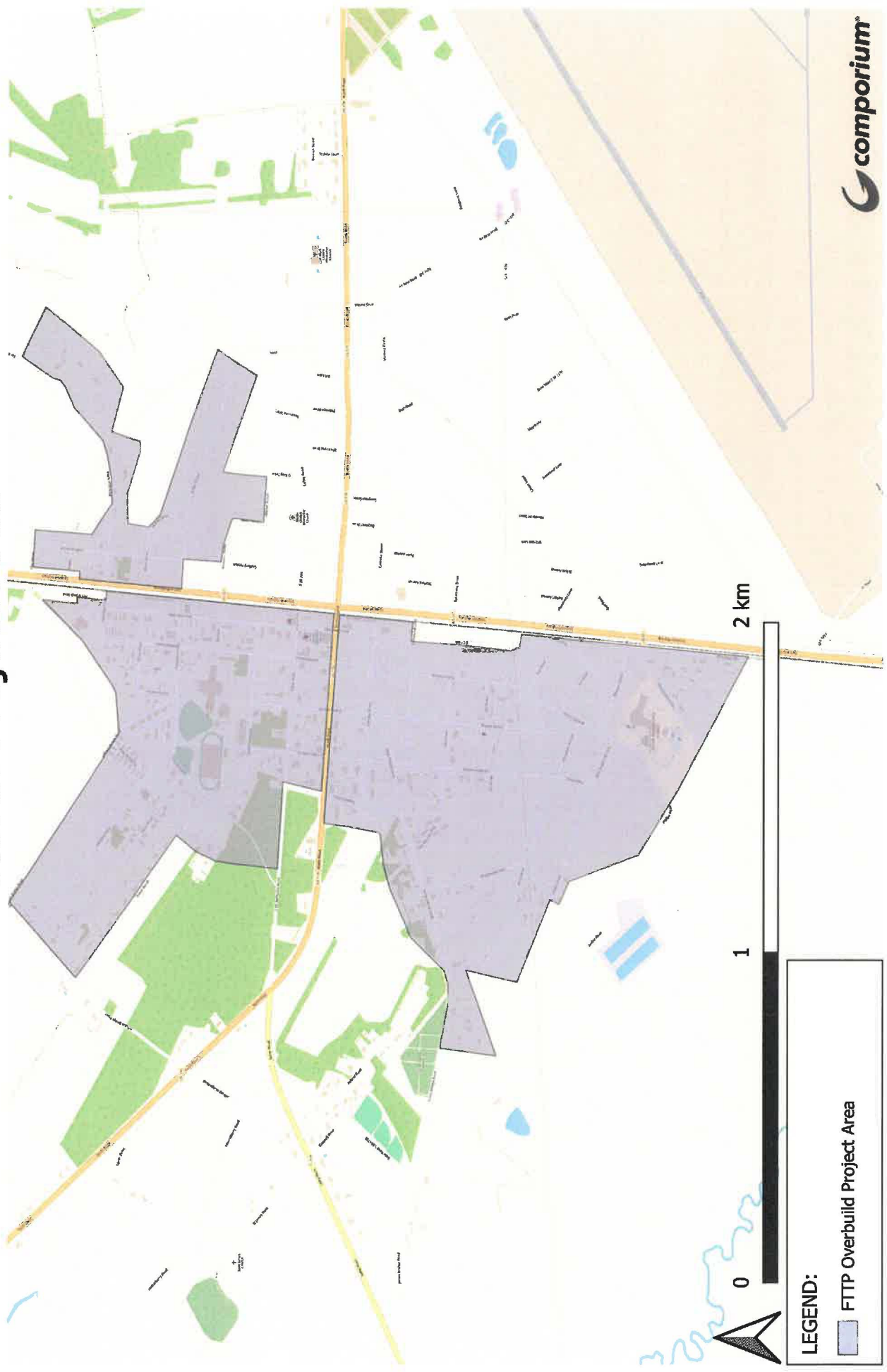
Question 4) Provide documents that demonstrate your organization currently has the necessary funds (50% of total project cost) to complete this project/proposal. List documents here and attach documents to this proposal.

See attached bank letter.

Question 5) List any lease, franchise agreement, interconnection agreement, authorization, permit, or other items needed to complete this project.

County Road Permits and/or SC Highway Permits will be obtained prior to construction being performed.

North Project Area



LEGEND:

FTP Overbuild Project Area



North WiFi Area

Target Areas:
North Town Pavilion and North Post Office



CUSTOMER EDUCATION

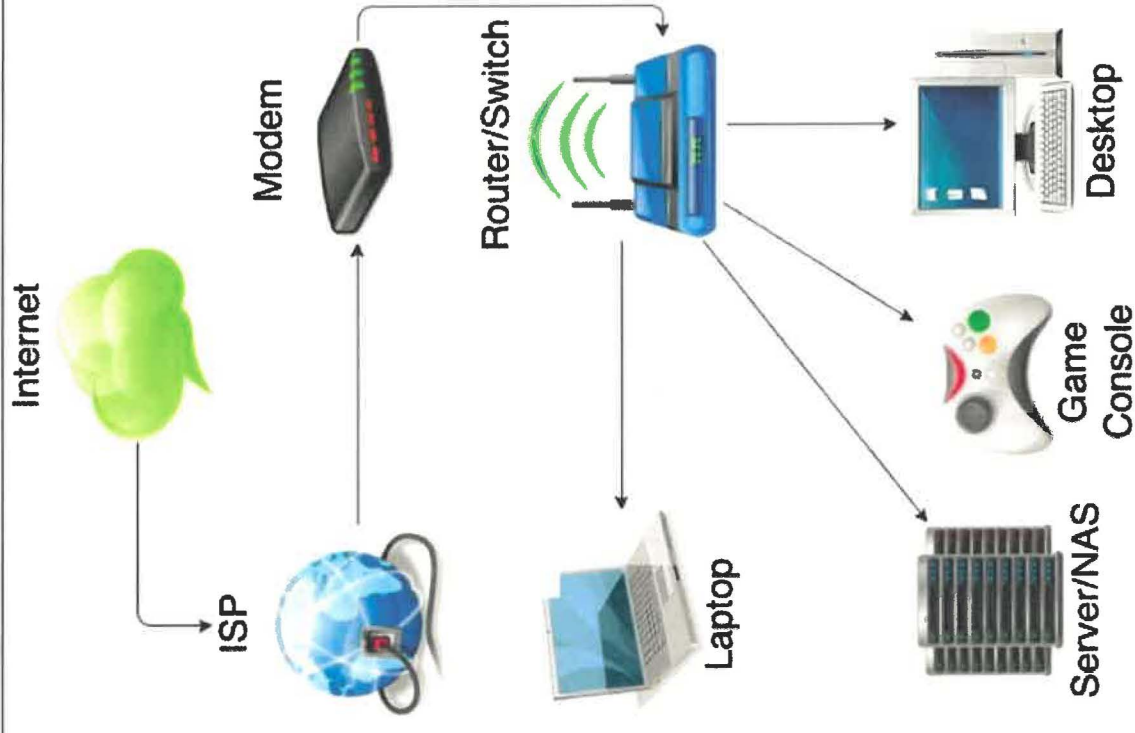
INTERNET SESSION



HOW DOES THE INTERNET WORK??

BASIC CONNECTION

- ISP Connection
- Modem at Customer location
- Switch/ Wi-Fi Router
- End-user Devices



BANDWIDTH

The amount of data that can be carried in a given time period over a network. More technically, bandwidth is the width of the range of frequencies that an electronic signal occupies on a given transmission medium. In digital systems, bandwidth is usually expressed as bps, Kbps or Mbps. In analog systems, it's the number of cycles of change per second, or hertz.

BROADBAND

A type of data transmission in which a single medium (wire) can carry several channels at once. Broadband is a term that is being used interchangeably with high-speed. More specifically, it describes a wideband high-speed data transmission that employs only one wire, which is able to carry multiple channels at once.

EQUIPMENT

HOW MUCH INTERNET SPEED DO I NEED?



Social media



Streaming music



Streaming video



File download and storage



Online gaming



Online video chat

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WIFI AND THE INTERNET?

I'm sure you've heard of the Internet... right?

Well, simply put, it's a big huge network that's changing humanity. Does that Jog your memory?

Now the real question is this: Do you know the difference between the *Internet* and your *WiFi network*?

If you don't, stay calm and I'll explain. If I can get you to remember one thing, it's this: *WiFi* and the *Internet* are two completely separate beasts. If you can remember that moving forward, then half of my job is done.

SO, WIFI IS JUST A RADIO SIGNAL?

Here is the differentiating factor between the *Internet* and *WiFi*. If Internet allows you to access information from other computers across the world using a specific language (protocol), then **WiFi** is just a way of connecting to that wire in your living room wall and out to the Internet, wirelessly. receive information to and from another computer. Without that protocol, even if two computers were connected with a cable, they wouldn't be able to understand each other. Like speaking with someone in Chinese on the phone - the connection is there - but if you don't understand the language, then there's no way you'll ever be able communicate.



2.4 Ghz

The 2.4 GHz band is a pretty crowded place, because it's used by more than just Wi-Fi. Old cordless phones, garage door openers, baby monitors, and other devices tend to use the 2.4 GHz band. The longer waves used by the 2.4 GHz band are better suited to longer ranges and transmission through walls and solid objects. So it's arguably better if you need better range on your devices or you have a lot of walls or other objects in the areas where you need coverage. However, because so many devices use the 2.4 GHz band, the resulting congestion can cause dropped connections and slower-than-expected speeds.



5 Ghz

The 5 GHz band is much less congested, which means you will likely get more stable connections. You'll also see higher speeds. On the other hand, the shorter waves used by the 5 GHz band makes it less able to penetrate walls and solid objects. It's also got a shorter effective range than the 2.4 GHz band. Of course, you may also be able to mitigate that shorter range through the use of range extenders or mesh Wi-Fi systems, but that will mean a bigger investment.



WiFi Problems?



HACKERS

WIFI
INTERFEREN
CE

LACK OF
COVERAGE

SAY GOODBYE TO DEAD ZONES WITH PREMIUM WIFI!

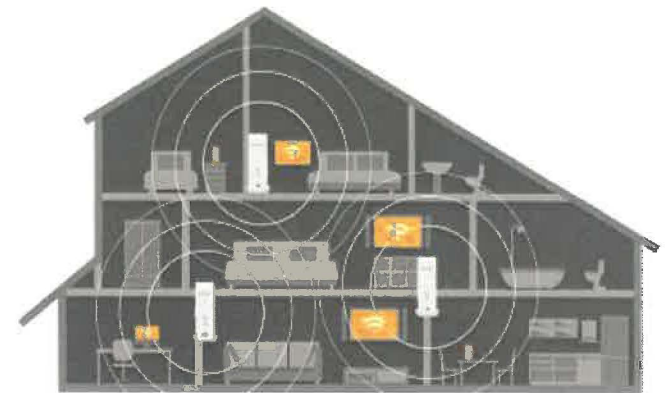
We know being able to enjoy your High Speed Internet from every corner of your home is important to you. Comporium Premium WiFi is the whole home solution for your wireless needs.

Your Entire Home. Covered. Connect to all of your devices, in every room.

Professional Installation Our technicians will personalize your installation according to your needs and the layout of your home.

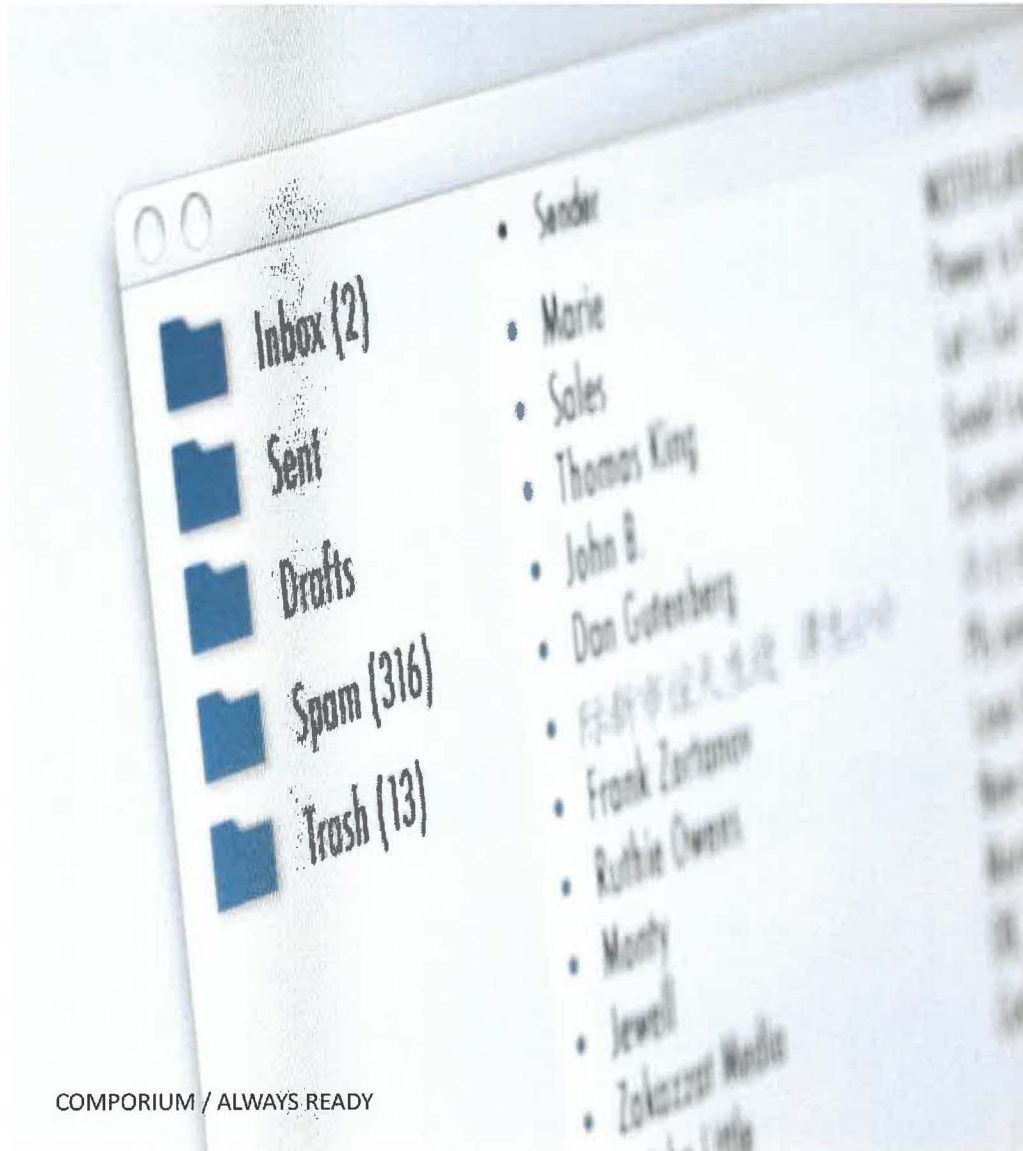
Easily Controlled. See connected devices, test speeds and control settings right from the Premium WiFi app.

Parental Controls. Filter and manage content or set time limits on connected devices!





EMAIL BASICS



5 WAYS TO STOP SPAM FROM INVADING YOUR EMAIL

- Train your filter
- Never respond to spam
- Hide your email address
- Use a third-party anti-spam filter
- Change your email address

ONLINE SCAMS

- Money is Involved
- If It Sounds Too Good to Be True...
- Urgent! Act Now! Don't Wait!
- The Power of Fear
- We Need Some of Your Personal Information



PASSWORD TIPS

1

Don't rely on passwords alone to protect anything you value. **Turn on multi-factor authentication wherever possible.**



2

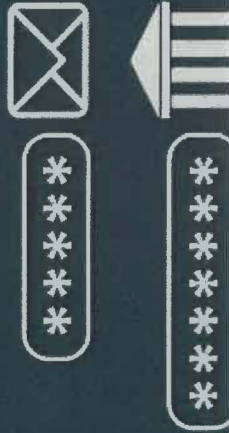
Use a phrase with multiple words that you can picture in your head, so it's difficult to guess but easy to remember.



Password: **sunwalkraindrive**

3

Protect your most important accounts, like banking and primary email, by giving each a **unique passphrase**. A password manager can help.



WHY TREND MICRO?



ANTIVIRUS PROTECTION

Keep your computer safe and protected with your free download of Trend Micro. The best in Internet security, Trend Micro protects your computer from harmful viruses. Install Trend Micro by simply selecting 'Manage Anti-Virus Software' through 'My Account.'



Brad Hutto

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Committees:
Banking and Insurance
Education
Ethics
Fish, Game and Forestry
Judiciary
Legislative Oversight
Medical Affairs
State Regulation of Public Utilities
Review Committee
Joint Citizens and Legislative
Committee on Children

May 10, 2021

Jim Stritzinger
Broadband Coordinator
SC Office of Regulatory Staff
State of South Carolina
1401 Main Street
Suite 900
Columbia, SC 29201

RE: Letter of Support for South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Project

Dear Mr. Stritzinger:

It is my understanding that PBT Telecom, Inc. d/b/a Comporium has applied for funding through the South Carolina Rural Broadband Grant Funding Initiative. This grant will allow them to provision fiber optics in areas of Orangeburg County.

Due to the rural nature of Orangeburg County, there are many areas that are underserved and unserved broadband locations, and fiber optics are the lifeblood of our 21st century economy. The availability and the capability to receive symmetrical high-speed internet service will serve as a catalyst for small business development and industrial growth in rural and sparsely populated areas.

PBT Telecom, Inc. d/b/a Comporium has served portions of Orangeburg County since 1903 with telecommunications services. The Company has worked diligently to upgrade their infrastructure with a combination of private and public funding over the years. I would respectfully request that the Office of Regulatory Staff look favorably and award this grant funding such that they build on past successes and deploy fiber facilities for future growth.

Thank you for your consideration of my support of this project on the behalf of our citizens of Orangeburg County and District 40.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad Hutto".

Brad Hutto



Communications

- Telephone
- Long Distance
- Wireless
- Cable TV
- Internet
- Security

1660 Juniper Springs Road
Gilbert, SC 29054
803-894-3121

This is to certify that Representative Russell Ott sent a letter of Support for this Project to the South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff directly to them for their consideration.

L.B. Spearman