



Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission
Rural Economies Workgroup Report
November 25th, 2013

To: Jon Laria, Chairman, Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission

From: Ryan Sigworth AICP, MDP, Rural Economies Workgroup Staff

Subj: Status Report on Rural Economies Workgroup Activities

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The Rural Economies Workgroup has not met since August 27th, 2013.

Currently, the workgroup is looking at Rural Broadband issues. I recently attended the Broadband Provider's Summit in Frostburg, where I learned several things relevant to the Commission's objectives in this arena. First, there is already strong county-level activity to address this issue in terms of residential access especially in western Maryland with a goal to serve 90% of the population. Garrett County already has broadband services available to 65% of its population. Second, access is generally not an obstacle for commercial customers. In addition, there are other counties in Maryland with broadband pilot programs moving forward such as Carroll County.

This information raises the question as to whether or not there is a useful role for the Sustainable Growth Commission to play in this arena. If the large majority of rural cities and towns already have access to broadband services, the Commission would have to consider what role it might play and to what ends.

A significant amount of research is needed to determine if this is a problem with a smart growth oriented solution. Questions remain such as, how much of rural Maryland is unserved by at least one broadband option? How much, if any, of the Priority Fund Area is unserved?

As a next step, the Workgroup should determine how it wishes to address these questions before proceeding.