

8. Broadband Services Element

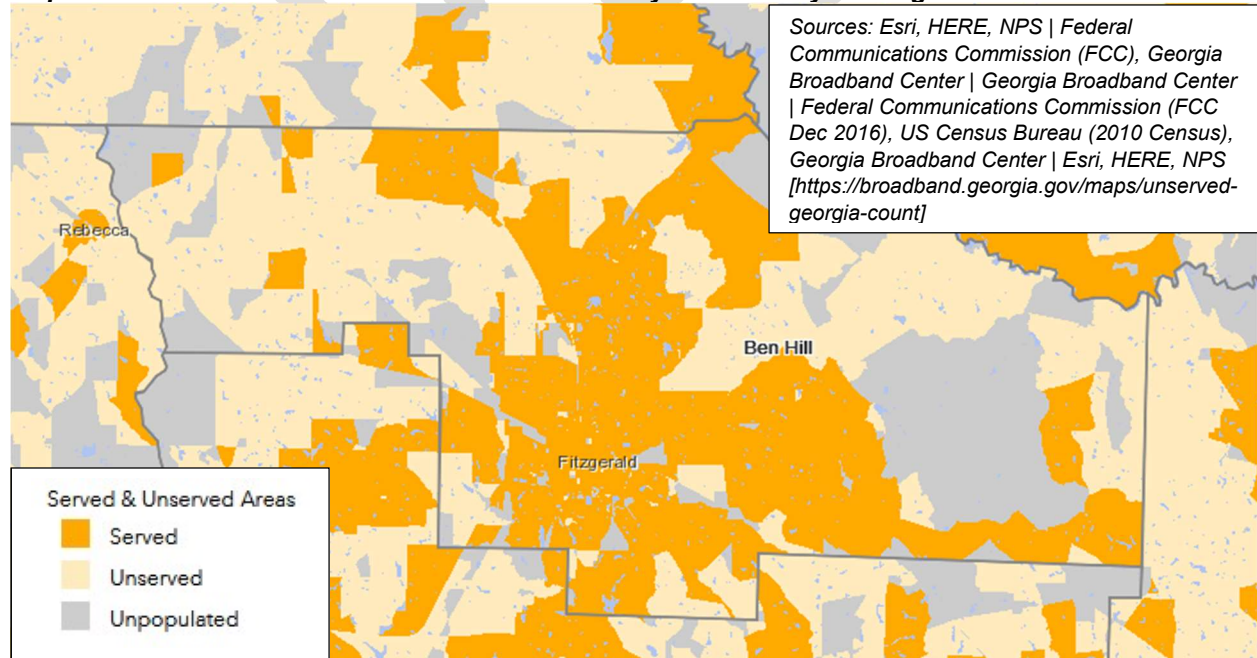
The Georgia legislature, in recognition of the importance of broadband infrastructure to the vitality of communities passed the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act (SB 402) in 2018. The Act provides for broadband services¹ planning, deployment, and incentives, along with other purposes. It also requires comprehensive plans to include the promotion of the deployment of broadband services. Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald recognize the importance of broadband expansion by including this Element in their Comprehensive Plan.

Provision of broadband services enables access by residents to a number of vital services such as healthcare, economic opportunity, and education. Expansion of rural broadband along with improvement in the provision of broadband services can address concerns of resident out-migration. Effective and efficient broadband enables internet-based businesses to succeed in the global economy. It is difficult to educate upcoming generations of students in web literacy and digital skills training without adequate broadband speed and connectivity.

Percent Unserved Locations: 11%
Unserved Households: 900
Unserved Businesses: 23
Unserved Population: 1,884
Total Households: 7,942
Total Businesses: 194
Total Population: 17,634

The latest data shown in Map 1 below identifies 11% of the locations in Ben Hill County as unserved. However, it has been noted the technique of classifying unserved locations is too broad. A Census block is categorized as “served” if at least one consumer in a Census block has broadband service available to them. As more granular data becomes available, a more accurate classification is expected and the percentage unserved is anticipated to rise.

Map 1: Served & Unserved Areas in Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald



¹ As defined in O.C.G.A. §50-40-1. Definitions. “Broadband services” means a wired or wireless terrestrial service that consists of the capability to transmit at a rate of not less than 25 megabits per second in the downstream direction and at least 3 megabits per second in the upstream direction to end users and in combination with such service provides:

- (A) Access to the Internet; or
- (B) Computer processing, information storage, or protocol conversion.

County statistics are based on a fixed, terrestrial broadband definition of 25 megabits per second down and 3 megabits per second up, and where the broadband service is available to at least ONE consumer (residential and business) in a census block. Populated census blocks that did not meet this definition are delineated in Map 1 (above) as 'Unserved'.

70.7% of households in Ben Hill County have a computer, compared to 87% of households statewide.² Broadband internet subscriptions in the County are held by 59.5% of households.³ During the analysis of broadband services provision in Ben Hill County, an electronic poll was distributed to businesses, hospitals, government bodies, libraries, and educational facilities. 83% of respondents indicated their Internet service options are not adequate (non-residential). 67% indicated the internet speeds and reliability do not sufficiently meet their needs. The results of the broadband poll are included in the Appendix.

Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald constructed a fiber network to connect City and County facilities approximately 20 years ago. The network was sold to the Georgia Public Web prior to 2015. The long term assumption is that the network will connect to the hospital to facilitate telemedicine services and ultimately will connect to the school system. In terms of other internet service providers, City and County industry representatives have found the current providers to be insufficient in their services and unresponsive in meeting their expectations of high quality and dependable internet service.

The County and City do not have full penetration by cellular service providers. Verizon is available in much of the County; however T-Mobile and Sprint are not presently available. This impacts tourism as visitors to Fitzgerald are not able, depending on their cellular service provider to utilize navigation applications to reach the City from I-75. There is the potential for impacts to public safety as there are a few dead spots within the County where emergency management professionals are not able to communicate with one another.

Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald recognize there are many barriers for private broadband services providers to effectively roll-out necessary broadband infrastructure in rural areas of the State. City and County leaders recognize the importance of broadband quality for industry retention and recruitment within this small, rural community. Community leaders continuously seek improvement in the quality of life for the rural residents of Ben Hill/Fitzgerald. Industry relocation and business creation are dependent on the necessary infrastructure being in place. The lack of high quality broadband infrastructure is a major impediment to not only recruitment but also for the expansion of established local industry. The Broadband Ready Community and Site designation has been established to incentivize private investment in the provision of rural broadband services. The County and City plan to apply for these designations and signal to the State and to private Internet Service Providers their prioritization of rural broadband improvement and expansion in their community.

² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Households with a computer, percent, 2013-2017

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates, Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2013-2017

Goal 9:
(Broadband)

Provide digital broadband and communications in a manner that ensures current and future needs of residents, businesses, and industry within Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald are met.

Broadband

Needs

- Lack of sufficient digital broadband coverage in large areas of Ben Hill County limits educational and economic development opportunities and causes communication problems for police, fire and EMS.
- More affordable, accessible, and higher-speed broadband access is needed throughout all of Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald.
- Technological product development is outpacing the availability of broadband infrastructure; medical centers, schools, libraries and businesses need to keep up with product developments yet are unable due to the limits of the infrastructure in rural areas.

Opportunities

- Better broadband services will improve the future for all citizens and businesses.
- Encourage partnership of providers to allow better broadband services.
- Public/private partnerships could be developed to provide comprehensive broadband coverage that is consistent, reliable, and equitable.
- Broadband infrastructure may be included during road project development to increase project efficiencies and outcomes.

Goal 9 (Broadband):

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Broadband Needs and Policies

- **NEED:** Lack of sufficient digital broadband coverage in large areas of Ben Hill County limits educational and economic development opportunities and causes communication problems for police, fire and EMS.

Policy 9.1: More robust broadband services may enable greater opportunity for citizens and businesses.

Policy 9.2: Include consideration of broadband infrastructure in roadway projects where the necessary infrastructure may be included in the right-of-way.

- **NEED:** More affordable, accessible, consistent, and higher-speed broadband access with additional bandwidth is needed throughout all of Ben Hill County and the City of Fitzgerald to serve residential, commercial, and industrial users.

Policy 9.3: Public/Private Partnerships could be developed to provide comprehensive broadband coverage that is consistent, reliable, and equitable.

- **NEED:** Technological product development is outpacing the availability of broadband infrastructure; medical centers, schools, libraries and businesses need to keep up with product developments yet are unable due to the limits of the infrastructure in rural areas.

Policy 9.4: The County and City should seek certification as Broadband Ready Communities and support a more robust provision of broadband infrastructure.

Ben Hill County 5-Year Community Work Program Update

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
CULTURAL RESOURCES									
Complete renovation of Federal Building and integrate into Grand/Carnegie Complex	\$400,000	County, City	Grants, general fund, SPLOST	2, 5	*	*	*	*	*
Develop a Master Resources Guide	\$50,000	County, City, Development Authority of Ben Hill County, Convention & Visitor's Bureau, Family Connections	Grants, general fund	2, 4, 5	*	*			
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
Prepare and maintain an inventory of incentives, business programs, housing stock and available sites to accommodate new businesses and business expansions, and provide the list on the county website.	Staff time	Chamber of Commerce, Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Development Authority	City and County Joint Service Funds	2	*	*			
Develop a guidebook for development that describes the local development process and provides useful information to potential new businesses regarding zoning, site plan approval, permitting and potential incentives.	Staff time	Chamber of Commerce, Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Development Authority	City and County Joint Service Funds	2	*	*			

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
Approve and implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan through the coordinated efforts of all economic development organizations	Staff time	Fitzgerald-Ben Hill Development Authority, other economic development organizations	City and County Joint Service Funds	2	*	*	*	*	*
Develop a Senior/Retiree Marketing Strategy	Staff time	Convention & Visitor's Bureau	General fund	1, 2, 3, 6	*	*			
Develop a Comprehensive Tourism Master Plan to incorporate under the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan	Staff time	Convention & Visitor's Bureau	General fund	2, 4, 5	*	*			
HOUSING									
Construct The Village at Ben Hill Phase 1	\$9 million	County	Low Income Housing Tax Credit, private funding	1	*	*			
Construct The Village at Ben Hill Phase 2	\$9 million	County	Low Income Housing Tax Credit, private funding	1			*	*	
LAND USE									
None listed									
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES									
Repair and resurface 82.1 miles of roads	\$8.2 million	County	General fund, LMIG, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	7	*	*	*	*	*
Replace Bethlehem Church Road Bridge	\$2 million	County	General fund, LMIG, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	7		*			

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
Replace Tulip Road Bridge	\$700,000	County	General fund, LMIG, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	7			*		
Complete renovations to Monitor gym, auditorium, and classroom building at Recreation Services complex	\$200,000	County, City	City, County, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	6, 7	*	*			
Implement airport improvements as listed in 5-year CIP for 2016-2020	\$4.66 million	Fitzgerald-Ben Hill County Airport Commission	Federal, State, and Local	2, 7	*	*	*	*	*
Complete Peachtree Corridor Industrial Transportation Project	\$8 million	County, City	General funds, grants, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval), loans, contributions	2, 7	*	*	*	*	*
Develop Comprehensive Mobility Plan	\$40,000	County, City	General fund	1, 2, 6, 7	*	*			
Complete façade maintenance on Grand Theater	\$75,000	County, City	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	5		*	*	*	*
Construct covers for existing outdoor performances spaces (downtown and Paulk Park)	\$50,000	County, City	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	6			*	*	
Complete Grand Theater ADA improvements, phase 2	\$20,000	County, City	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	5		*	*		
Construct a multi-use recreational facility, offices, gymnasium, and/or swimming pool	\$1.5 million	County, City	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval)	6			*	*	*

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
Construct Merrimac Rd. sidewalks from Merrimac Village Apts. to Central Ave	\$250,000	County	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval), GDOT	1, 7		*	*		
Construct Dewey McGlamry Road (SR90) sidewalks from Jack Allen Rd to Sultana Ave	\$150,000	County	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval), GDOT	1, 7		*	*		
Construct Benjamin H Hill Drive SE sidewalks and/or culvert extension & pedestrian bridge from SR90 to Walmart (with pedestrian signals)	\$250,000	County	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval), GDOT	1, 7			*	*	
Construct Sultana Drive (SR90) sidewalks from Jefferson St. to Merrimac Dr.	\$300,000	County	General fund, SPLOST (pending SPLOST approval), GDOT	1, 7			*	*	
Recruit 2 physicians per year to Dorminy Medical Center	\$20,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7		*		*	
Renovate emergency room at Dorminy Medical Center	\$300,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7		*			
Implement Hospital Cosmetic Upgrades at Dorminy Medical Center	\$75,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7	*	*	*	*	
Replace front of Masee Building at Dorminy Medical Center	\$50,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7	*				
Upgrade Medical Equipment and Computers at Dorminy Medical Center	\$300,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7	*	*	*	*	*
Replace Hospital Elevator sat Dorminy Medical Center	\$80,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7		*			
Replace 3 Chillers at Dorminy Medical Center	\$600,000	DMC	DMC	2, 7	*		*		
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION									
Research opportunities for inter-governmental agreements with surrounding counties to better facilitate emergency services	Staff time	County, City	General funds	8	*	*	*	*	*
BROADBAND									

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
Provide adequate high speed broadband access for local industries and commercial businesses.	\$10,000,000	County, City, Public/Private Partnership	General Fund, SPLOST, grants, private funding	9					*
Adopt a Broadband Ordinance	Staff time	County	General funds	9					*
Apply for Broadband Ready Certification	Staff time	County	General funds	9					*

Fitzgerald 5-Year Community Work Program Update

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
CULTURAL RESOURCES									
Develop Downtown Master Plan	Staff time	City	General fund	1, 2, 5, 6, 8	*	*			
Re-evaluate existing tree ordinance and develop a replanting strategy	Staff time	City	General fund	2, 4, 6	*	*			
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT									
None listed									
HOUSING									
None listed									
LAND USE									
None listed									
COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES									
Complete Jaycee Stadium improvements	\$900,000	City, Board of Education	SPLOST, ELOST	6	*	*	*	*	*
Renovate A, B & A Depot for preservation and flexible space.	\$625,000	City	SPLOST, Federal funds	5		*	*	*	*
Resurface approximately 15 miles of city streets; associated transportation improvements; sidewalks, parking, and storm drainage right-of-way.	\$1.5 million	City	General fund, SPLOST, LMIG	7	*	*	*	*	*
Review and implement improvements to ADA compliance plan by adding facilities annually.	\$25,000	City	General fund	1, 7	*	*	*	*	*
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION									

PROJECTS	ESTIMATED COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	FUNDING SOURCE	GOAL	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20
None listed									
BROADBAND									
Provide adequate high speed broadband access for local industries and commercial businesses.	\$10,000,000	County, City, Public/Private Partnership	General Fund, SPLOST, grants, private funding	9					*
Adopt a Broadband Ordinance	Staff time	City	General funds	9					*
Apply for Broadband Ready Certification	Staff time	City	General funds	9					*

Comprehensive Plan Appendix

Sign-In Sheets

Public Hearing Notices

Broadband Survey Results

Constant Contact Survey Results

Survey Name: Aug 12 2019 Survey

Response Status: Partial & Completed

Filter: None

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1. What address are you reporting for? Please note, this survey is only for non-residential addresses (this includes businesses, governments, libraries, schools, and hospitals/medical centers).

6 Response(s)

2. Which of the following Internet access options are available at this address (check all that apply)?:

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
No access	0	0.0%
DSL (Dial Up)	1	16.6%
Cable Modem	2	33.3%
Fiber	4	66.6%
Mobile/Wireless	1	16.6%
Satellite	0	0.0%
Other	1	16.6%
Total	6	100%

2 Comment(s)

3. Are the Internet service options at this address adequate?

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	1	16.6%
No	5	83.3%
No Responses	0	0.0%
Total	6	100%
2 Comment(s)		

4. Which of the following uses would Internet service at this address be for (check all that apply)?

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Business	3	50.0%
School	1	16.6%
Medical	1	16.6%
Government	3	50.0%
Library	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	6	100%

5. Is your Internet service consistently reliable for the address you are reporting on?

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	2	33.3%
No	4	66.6%
No Responses	0	0.0%
Total	6	100%
3 Comment(s)		

6. Are the internet speeds sufficient to meet your needs for the address you are reporting on?

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	2	33.3%
No	4	66.6%
No Responses	0	0.0%
Total	6	100%
3 Comment(s)		

7. Does the internet service cost seem appropriate for the service speed and reliability received at the location you are reporting on?

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	1	16.6%
No	4	66.6%
No Responses	1	16.6%
Total	6	100%
1 Comment(s)		

8. By submitting my contact information, I consent to receive communications regarding this survey data.

First Name	6
Last Name	6
Company Name	6
Work Phone	4
Email Address	6
Address 1	4
Address 2	3
City	5
State/Province (US/Canada)	6
Postal Code	5