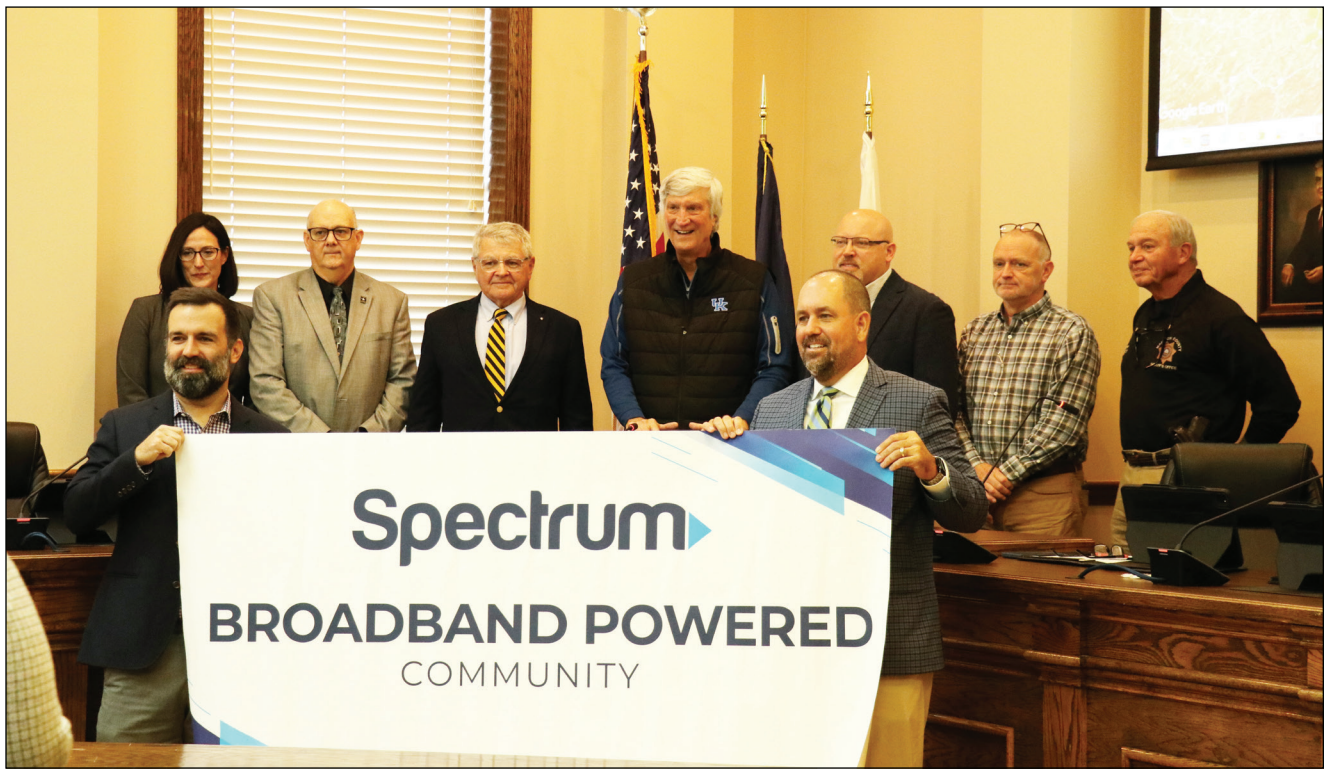
County completes broadband internet project, amends business park agreement

BLAKE VICKERS
RICHMOND REGISTER

BEREA — The Madison County Fiscal Court is celebrating after the completion of a years-long broadband internet expansion project with Spectrum. The county's efforts to expand internet access, particularly to rural areas, began as a side effect of the pandemic. As a result of those efforts, gigabit internet services were brought to over 5,000 homes and businesses in Madison County. With the College Hill, Kirksville, Speedwell, and Dreyfus areas among the places where services were expanded.

"The update is that those projects have now been completed," said Ben U'Selis of Spectrum. "That is the work we've done with this county, with a lot of other entities... to extend fiber broadband to more than 5,000 homes in this county. That does not include the hundreds of miles of fiber that we already had in Berea and Richmond."

According to U'Selis, Spectrum invested over $12 million into the project to bring over 550 miles of fiber through the county. For their part, the Fiscal Court invested $750,000 into the project. The rest of the funding was padded out through state grants and federal funding.



(Top Row, left to right) Jennie Haymond, County Attorney; Magistrate Tom Botkin; Magistrate Billy Ray Hughes; Magistrate Stephen Lochmueller; Magistrate Brian Combs; County Clerk Kenny Barger; Sheriff Mike Coyle. (Bottom row, left to right)Ben U'Selis, Spectrum and County Judge Executive Reagan Taylor. | BLAKE VICKERS

"We've been on monthly calls with Judge (Taylor), Jill (Williams), and Chris (Israel) talking about this project. Not only providing updates, but bringing in utilities companies. Because a large part of this project was attaching to utility poles throughout rural Madison County. More than 10,000 poles across the county we touched," U'Selis said.

2,000 to 3,000 poles were replaced in that process.

Magistrate Tom Botkin reflected on the origins of the project. He recalled it's pandemic-era origins.

"You have to go back to 2020 to realize what started all of this. We had kids at home that didn't have the ability to go to a public library or some other place where they could get access to just do the simplifying thing needed for their schooling. That's what started all of this. It's been a long road and you guys have been amazing all the way through it," Botkin said.

Judge Executive Reagan Taylor thanked the Spectrum team for their consistent communication with the county throughout the project. He thinks it ultimately made the process go along faster than it would have.

"Sometimes constituents thought we were taking too long. But it was a big endeavor. and I'm glad we're here together at the end," Taylor said.

CENTRAL KY BUSINESS PARK AUTHORITY AMENDMENT

The Fiscal Court made an amendment to their agreement with the Central Kentucky Business Park Authority. The regional economic development interlocal cooperation agreement was initially made on Dec. 5, 2024. As part of that agreement, the Madison County Fiscal Court needs to notify all of its partners about financing or property acquisitions. In this case, the planned site of the 722.14 acre industrial park on 2494 Lexington Road, which will be acquired by the Central Kentucky Business Park Authority.

"In a nutshell as a review, what this means is that the interlocal agreement that was established in 2024 outlined that... they had to notify all partners of any financing or any acquisition of property. and so this is the Central Kentucky Business Park's notification as an amendment to that interlocal agreement," Deputy Judge Executive Jill Williams said. "Obviously we all know that the Commonwealth of Kentucky has approved $20 million for the land acquisition through House Bill 900 administered by the Economic Development Cabinet. But no local government will guarantee the loan or pledge any taxing power for repayment... There is no obligation for the Fiscal Court for what the Central Kentucky Business Park is transpiring."

The amendment was passed as part of Resolution 2026-098, with all but Magistrate Billy Ray Hughes (who was consistently voted against the progression of the business park) voting to support it.

OTHER BUSINESS

Bethany Smith and Connie Baird were both granted another term on the Madison County Cooperative Extension Board. The Fiscal Court also approved of the meeting schedule for the 2027 Calendar year.

HAVEN

Continued from Page 1

range, the youngest guest they've housed was 18 and the oldest was 80. The average age of their guests is 45.

"Our oldest guest right now is 80-years-old. He is an older gentleman, just going through a circumstance and all of the sudden finds himself unhoused. There's not substance abuse, there's not mental illness. It is just some circumstances that has ended him to be unhoused," Barnes said.

47% of Haven of Hope's guest have come from within Richmond. 7% have come from Berea, while 20% have come from Madison County outside of either city's limits. 26% of guests who have come to Haven of Hope from other Kentucky counties or from different states. Barnes noted that around five current guests are working to get back to their home states.

40% of the guests at Haven of Hope have been the victim of crime. According to Barnes, many of the people who pass through the shelter did so out of unfortunate circumstance and nothing more.

"A lot of our guests truly are a victim of just a bad circumstance. Whether it be crime or medical bills that piled up. Or, you know, a family member has put them out all the sudden. There's not a lot of substance use at the shelter with our intakes that come in. Very few report that they are in active addiction or have been addicted. Mental illness is our other biggest need," Barnes said.

Haven of Hope works closely with community partners like New Vista to help residents who are struggling with mental illness.

Barnes took pride in the fact that 73 of Haven of Hope's guests have transitioned into new housing. For the majority of them, it's been a room to rent or a new apartment, though others have moved in with loved ones. The most recent Haven of Hope guest to find housing just moved into an apartment on Nov. 10 after staying at the shelter for 263 days. The individual was able to find a job and save up enough money for their own place.

Barnes noted that finding steady work can be a big challenge for some of the residents at the Haven of Hope.

"Sometimes it takes some time to get a job... Maybe they walk through the door not looking like you are I do. Maybe they look a little different. Maybe they act a little different. Still, we are all human. We are all capable of working and bettering ourselves," Barnes said.

Haven of Hope has helped 36 guests go into treatment for substance use disorder. The shelter is low-barrier for entry. They don't drug test and allow pets at entry. However, if drug use is suspected, residents are tested.

"We have a lot of rules to keep everyone safe in the building. While we don't drug test regularly, if I suspect there's drug use sometimes I will intervene and put someone out if I feel it's not safe for the other people there," Barnes said.

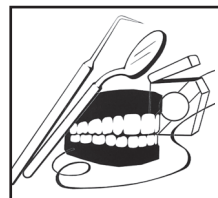
Barnes said that residents at the shelter are allowed to stay beyond 30 days if they are actively

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