Allegan County Broadband Action Workgroup

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http://www.allegancounty.org

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BROADBAND ACTION WORKGROUP – AGENDA

Thursday, February 29, 2024 – 4PM
County Services Building, Board Room
3283 122nd Avenue, Allegan, MI 49010
Virtual Meeting Options – Connectivity Instructions **Attached**

4PM **CALL TO ORDER**:
ROLL CALL
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:
PRESENTATIONS: none

COMMUNICATIONS: M Live article
APPROVAL OF MINUTES: October 19, 2023
REPORTS/UPDATES:
County Administrator
Broadband Project Manager
- 123Net Project Update
- Update on the Comprehensive Plan
- Cellular Coverage Update

DISCUSSION ITEMS:
1. Review the purpose of the BAW and discuss whether the BAW has completed its work.

ACTION ITEMS:
1. Recommendation to end the Broadband Action Workgroup.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:
ADJOURNMENT:
Next Meeting ???

Broadband Action Workgroup Goals:
- Step 1 – Upon verification of eligibility through the ARPA funds or identification/allocation of alternative funds, hire a directly employed or contracted project lead (and possibly team) to lead the project and deliver results for Board approved Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Time-based (S.M.A.R.T.) goals.
- Step 2 – Consider partners, technical professionals, and other stakeholders to serve as an advisory resource to the project team.
- Step 3 – Gather necessary and relevant data to form S.M.A.R.T. goals.
- Step 4 – Consider plans, proposals, legislative initiatives and other resources to establish and implement plans for increased accessibility.

Allegan County

Broadband Action Workgroup

Allegan County
3283 122nd Ave
Allegan, MI 49010

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STEP 1: Connect to the Meeting

- **OPTION 1: Zoom over Telephone**
  - Call (929) 205-6099 -or- (312) 626-6799 -or- (253) 215-8782
  - Type in Meeting ID: 854 0746 8607, then #, then # again
  - Type in Meeting Password: 2024, then #
  - To raise your hand to speak, press *9
  - To Mute and Unmute, press *6

<STOP here>

You do not have to continue reading the rest of the instructions.

- **OPTION 2: Youtube**
  - Open Internet Explorer or Chrome
  - Navigate to https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQIiZQstN2Pa57QAItAWdKA
  - Click on image of "Live" video

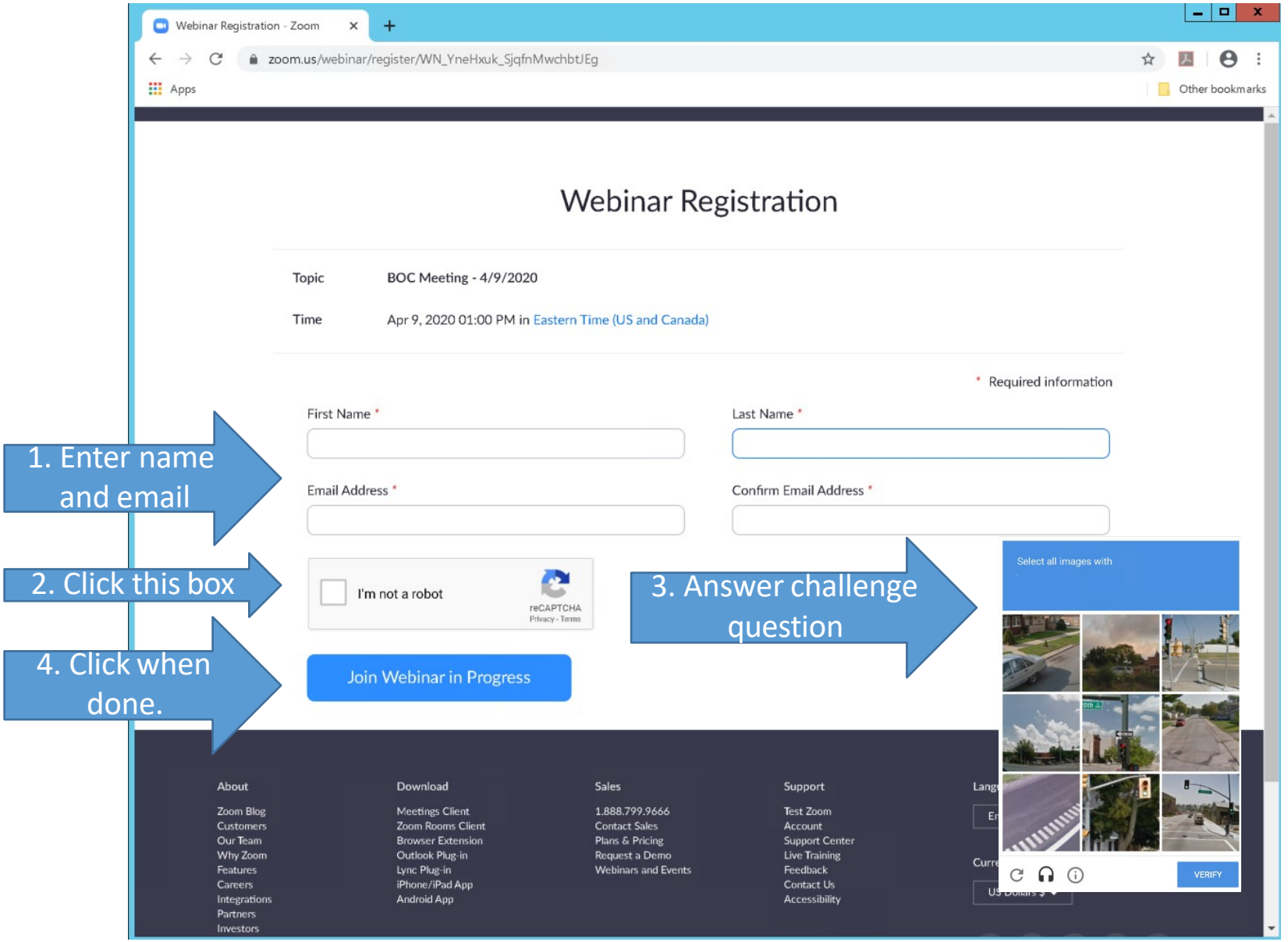
<STOP here>

You do not have to continue reading the rest of the instructions.

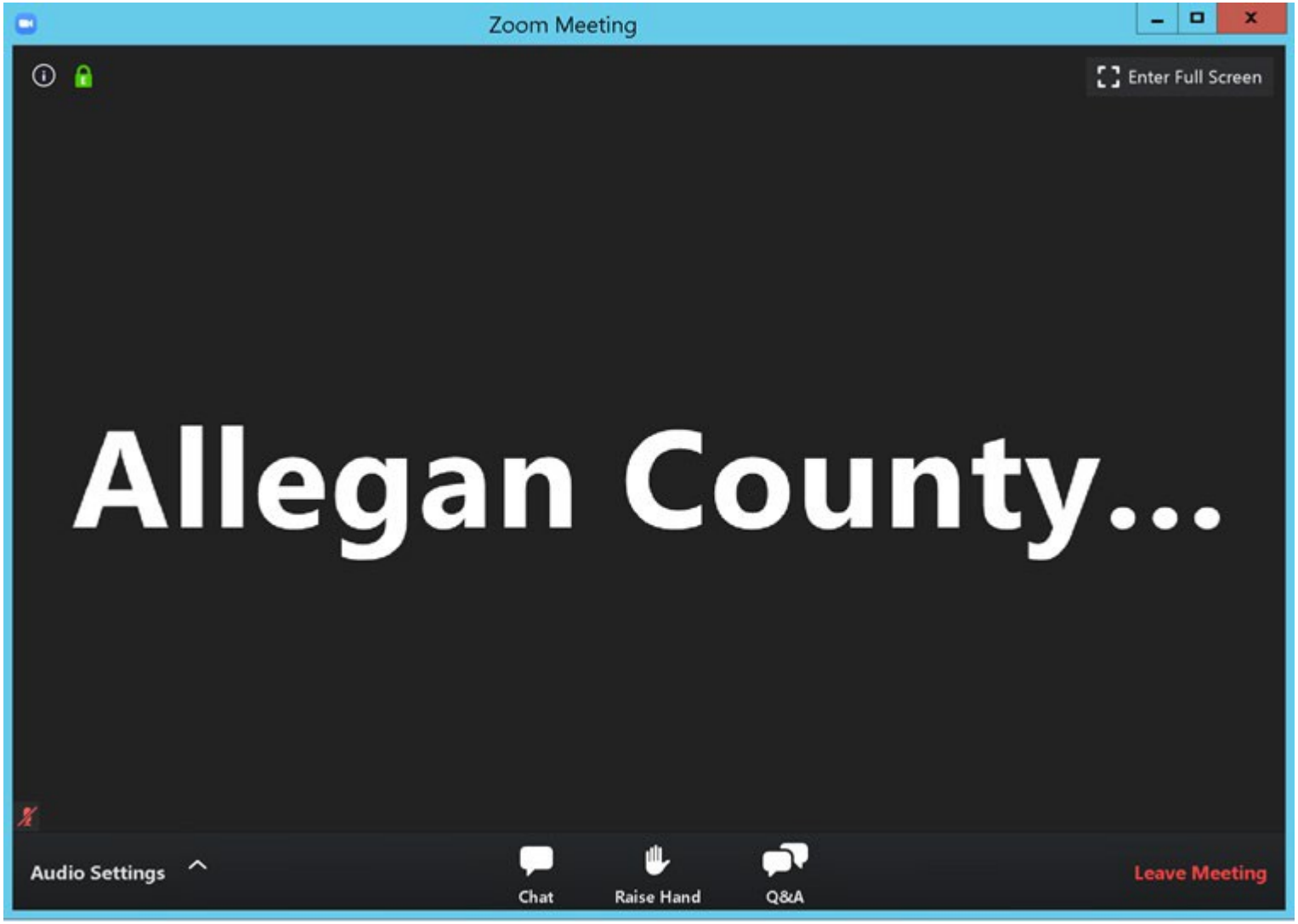
- **OPTION 3: Zoom over Web browser**
  - Open Internet Explorer or Chrome
  - Navigate to https://zoom.us/j/85407468607
  - Meeting Password: 2024

<Continue with the rest of the instructions>

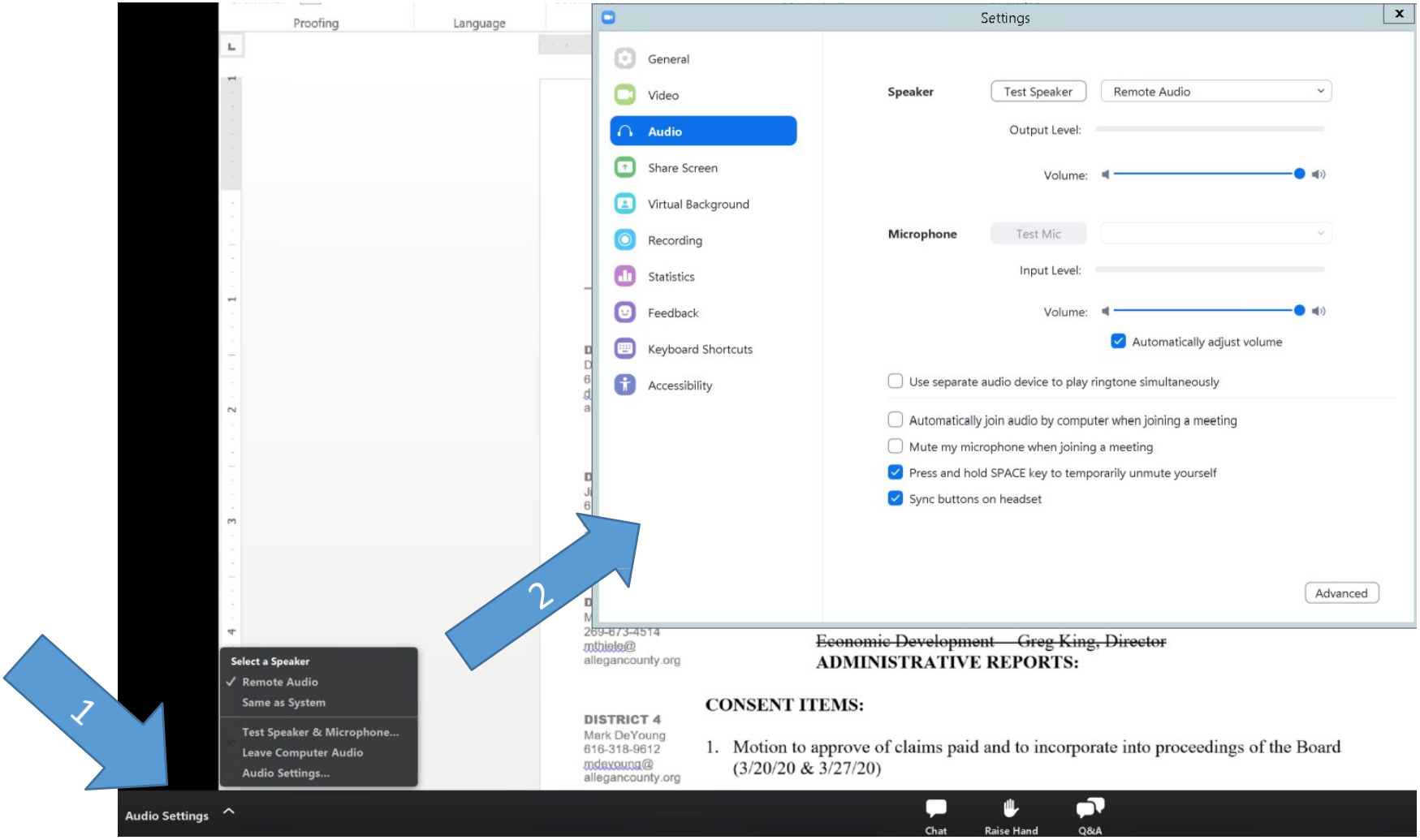
STEP 2: Enter registration information



STEP 3: This Window will appear when connected.



STEP 4: Adjust audio settings (if needed)



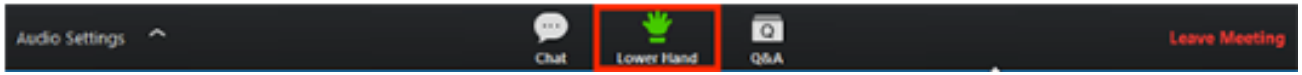
STEP 5: Raise hand to be recognized to speak.

- Once “Raise Hand” is clicked, the Board Chairperson will receive notice and may UNMUTE your microphone when ready and verbally recognize you to speak.

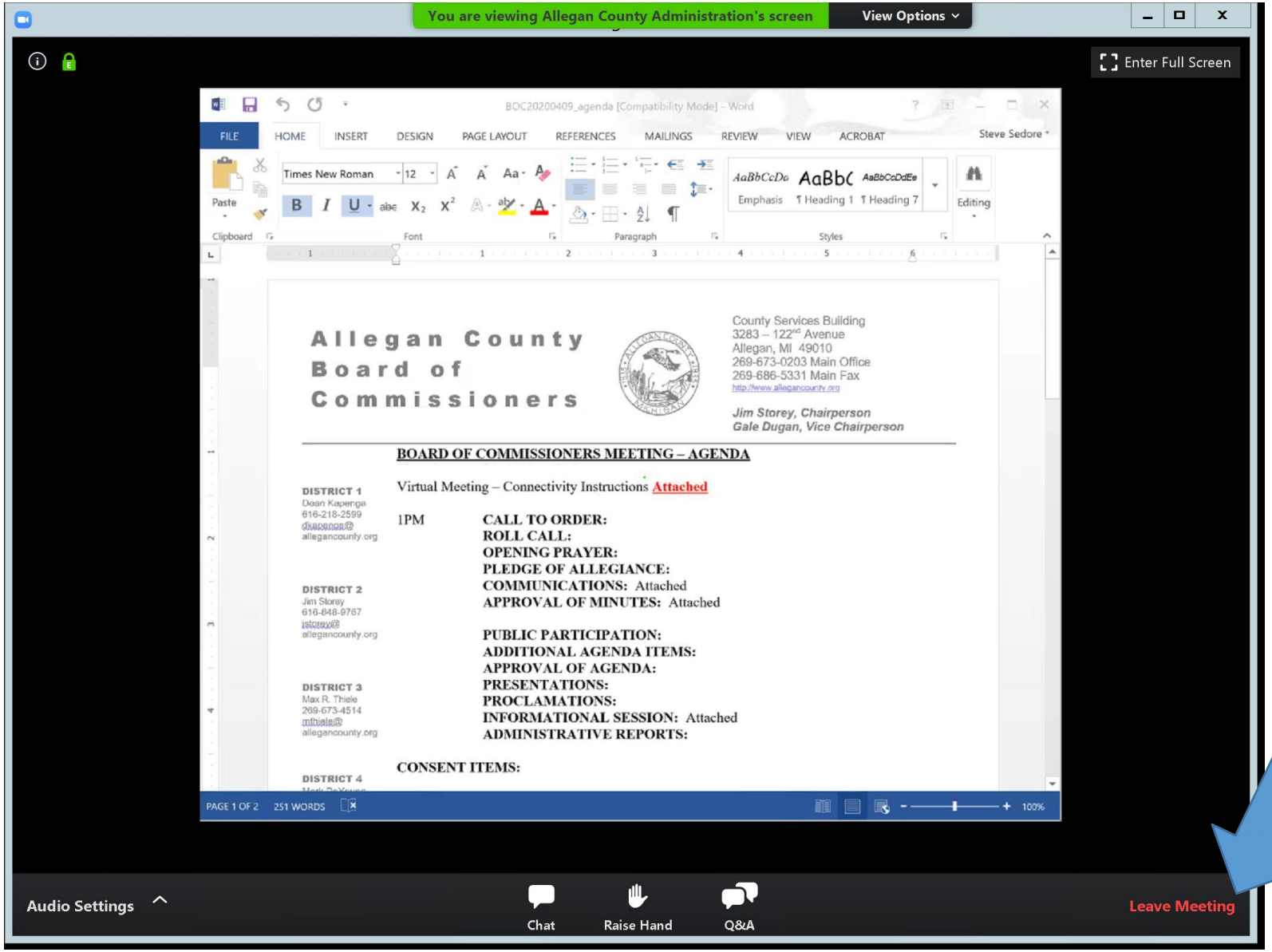
<u>On bottom of screen.</u>

1. Click **Raise Hand** in the Webinar Controls.

2. The host will be notified that you've raised your hand.
3. Click **Lower Hand** to lower it if needed.



STEP 6: To leave the meeting



Living in an ‘internet black hole’ is hard. 1,100 miles of fiber could help.

- Updated: Jan. 21, 2024, 7:12 a.m.|
- Published: Jan. 21, 2024, 7:02 a.m.

A worker installs infrastructure for a fiber network like the one being constructed in Allegan County. (123NET photo)

By Rose White | rwhite@mlive.com

At one point, Stephanie Calhoun was paying $400 a month for spotty mobile internet.

It was a “very unpleasant surprise” when Calhoun moved to Michigan in June 2020 and discovered she couldn’t access broadband internet at her Allegan County home. “How did we get all the way to 2020 and not have a very basic utility available for people. How did that happen?” she said.

Calhoun, 39, and her family are one of an estimated 1.23 million Michigan households that don’t have a reliable, affordable internet connection. That includes 456,000 who don’t have any internet access, according to a 2021 state report.

This digital divide between haves and have nots leaves millions of Americans in rural and low-income areas without reliable internet for work, school or telehealth services. But Michigan is trying to bridge this gap with a windfall of federal dollars.

The state last year received more than $1.5 billion, the fourth largest allocation in the country, through the $42 billion Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) fund. Another $238 million is supporting the Realizing Opportunity with Broadband Infrastructure Networks, ROBIN, federal grant program.

That grant will help Allegan County reach its goal of bringing internet to 99% of households by 2025. “Most people are going to be within a very short distance to the fiber backbone,” said Allegan County Broadband Project Manager Jill Dunham. “It makes it a lot easier to close those teeny gaps and make sure those people don’t fall through the cracks.”

Federal regulators currently define broadband as download speeds of 25 megabytes per second, but that “outdated” standard could be quadrupled under an inquiry launched last fall. Michigan views the digital divide as anyone who relies on satellite, mobile data or connecting to the internet at libraries, schools and businesses.

“I didn’t know that internet was an issue in parts of the country,” said Calhoun, who works as the executive director of the Allegan County Community Foundation. “Because my husband is retired Navy, we’ve lived in many parts of the country. We even lived on a tiny island off another island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea with internet that was better than what we were getting here.”

The Calhoun family, who lives in Gun Plain Township, went to extremes trying to find a connection. They first got two Fire WiFi networks to supply internet for two adults working from home and three kids attending Zoom classes during the pandemic. This came with a steep bill and unreliable service. Calhoun could hear her high schooler trying to learn chemistry with choppy video and her middle schooler struggling to stay connected to a video class.

They eventually switched to a T-Mobile home internet, which Calhoun says is “better but not great,” for $50 a month. “We’ve been able to work our way around the issues,” she said. “But just in general, the county, they’re at a disadvantage from not having access to information or telehealth.”

Population density and cost are the key reasons broadband has not been laid in rural areas. “You have a road that only has 10 or 12 people per mile and they are only going to pay less than $100 a month. And you’ve got to put in fiber that costs like $25,000 to $50,000 a mile,” Dunham said. “The math doesn’t work out. You can never be profitable.”

Eighteen Michigan projects received dollars from the federal grant program last year to connect 70,000 homes and businesses to high-speed internet. The highest grant of $28 million went to 123Net – a internet service provider that will install 1,100 miles of fiber throughout Allegan County over the next two years. The county earmarked $17.7 million of American Rescue Plan Act dollars to fund the $65 million broadband project. This was matched by $17.7 million from 123Net and supplemented by the ROBIN grant. An estimated 11,024 addresses will be connected to broadband internet when the project is complete. “It’s a light at the end of the tunnel,” Calhoun said.

Helen Goyings, a retired school teacher, was also surprised about the lack of internet after she and her husband moved into a newly built neighborhood on Big Lake in Watson Township seven years ago. It's a quiet area – the nearest Meijer is seven miles away – that's also bustling with deer, cranes and swans. But Goyings, 65, estimates they live two miles from any broadband fiber. "It's an internet black hole," she said.

The Goyings currently rely on two Verizon Jetpacks – one with 150 gigabytes a month and another with 50 gigabytes – that cost up to $140 a month. Zoom calls regularly get dropped, the connection fails during bad weather and they always run out of internet before the month ends.

"I just never realized how much of a burden it would be," she said about the lack of broadband. Homes on Big Lake are expected to have broadband by April, according to 123Net, and Goyings is looking forward to having reliable internet that lasts an entire month.

Broadband is also an economic development tool that Dunham recommends wielding carefully to protect "our beautiful rural county." "When you put internet in every home in a county as beautiful and fabulous as Allegan, there's going to be huge demand," she said.

ALLEGAN COUNTY BROADBAND UPDATE

Jill Dunham
Project Manager
Thursday, February 29, 2024

PROJECT TIMELINE

AUG 2021

First meeting of the Broadband Action Workgroup

SEP-OCT 2021

Meetings with current providers to gather information.

DEC 21 – FEB 22

Project Manager job posted, interviews conducted and Project Manager hired.

MAR-APR 2022

More meetings with providers. Discussion about options to pursue. How to prioirtize ARPA funds.

MAY-AUG 2022

Developed and released Request for Proposal for fiber internet for 12,000 addresses in Allegan County.

SEP-OCT 2022

Bids received and evaluated.

PROJECT TIMELINE

CONTINUED

NOV 2022

123Net Announced as RFP Winner on November 3.

JAN 2023

Public Private Partnership Contract executed between 123Net and Allegan County.

MAR 2023

123Net submitted proposal for $30m for ROBIN grant (Realizing Opportunities with Broadband Infrastructure Networks.)

JUN 2023

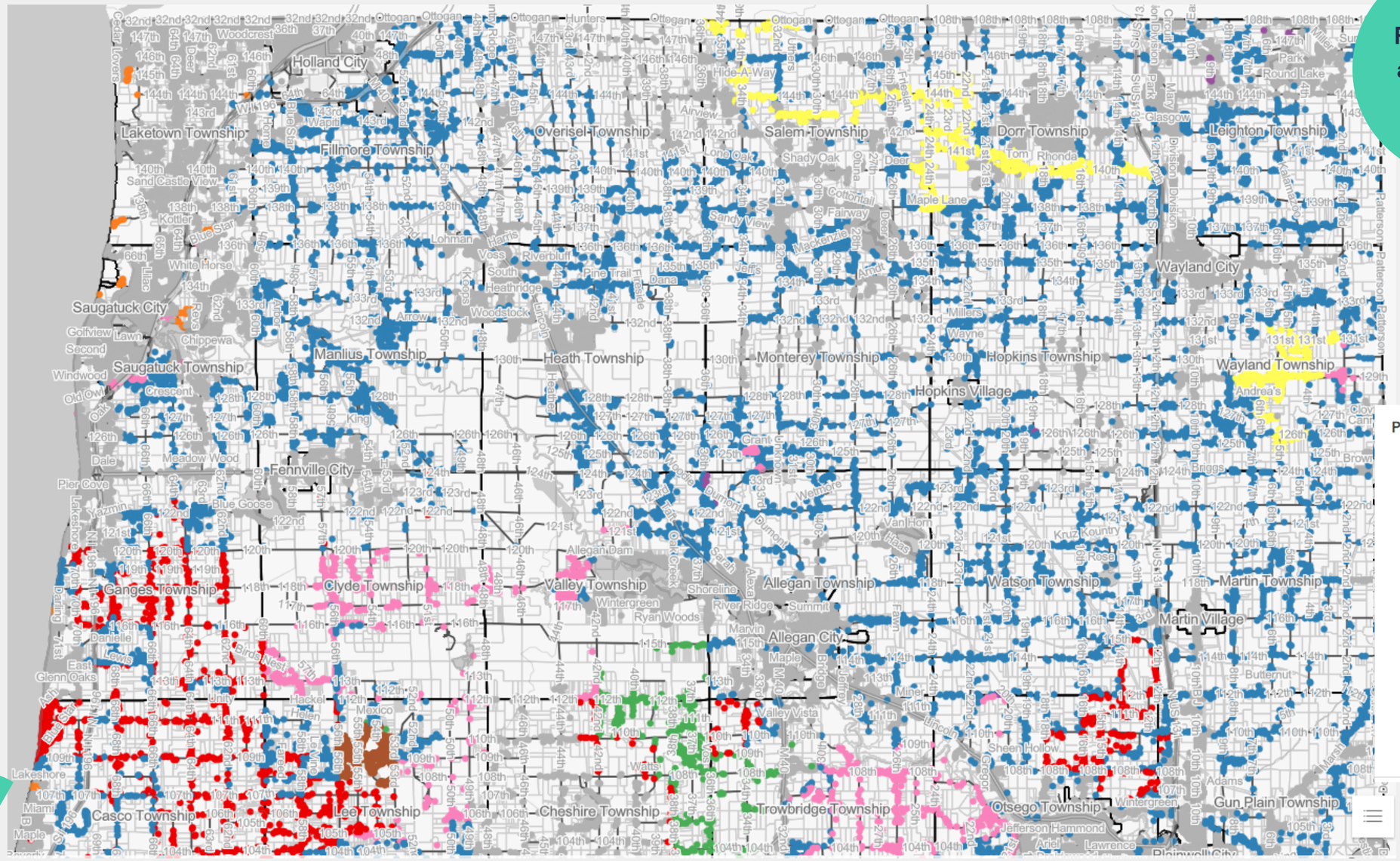
123Net Initial ROBIN grant award announced; 123Net proposal 3rd out of 154 proposals!

SEP 2023

123Net notified of challenged addresses in proposal

OCT 2023

Final ROBIN award announced by Governor Whitmer on October 26!



Find your address and help us check accuracy!

Property Addresses

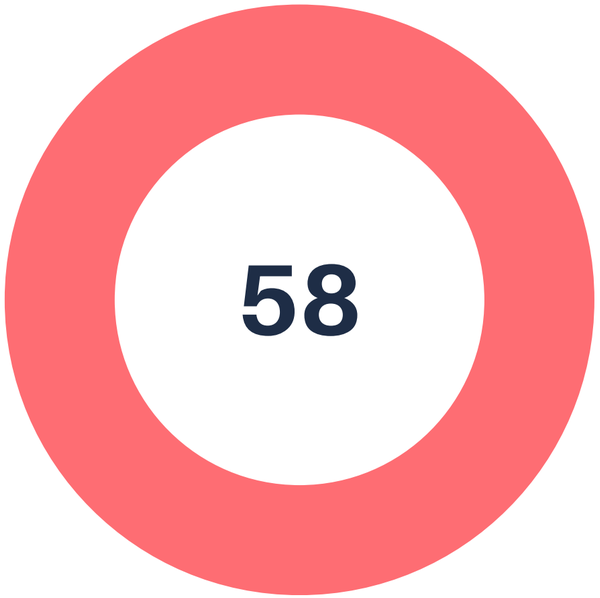
- Served - Existing Service
- Unserved - 123NET
- Unserved - Bloomingdale
- Unserved - Charter Spectrum
- Unserved - Comcast
- Unserved - Great Lakes Energy Truestream
- Unserved - Lee Twp Pullman Project
- Unserved - Mercury Broadband
- Unserved - Midwest Electric & Communication

www.allegancounty.org/broadband

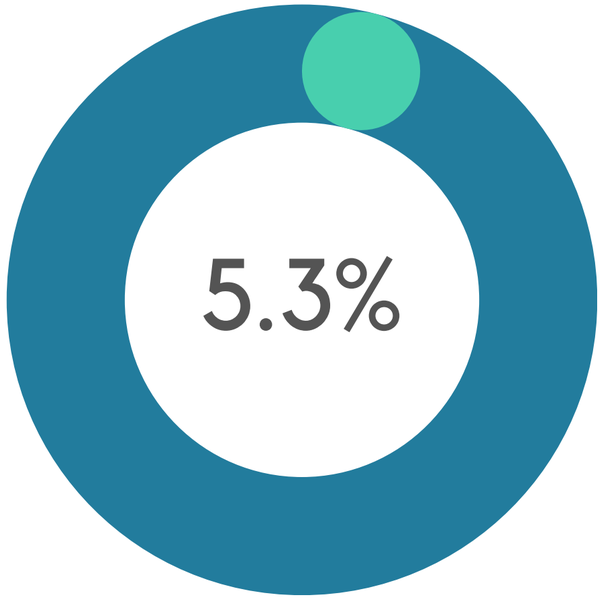
123NET	11,024 addresses funded with ROBIN grant; 700 in Lee Twp w ARPA
RDOF	Midwest Energy (MEC) 2,300 Mercury Broadband 1,200 Charter Spectrum 80
BLOOMINGDALE (BCI)	700 addresses; Cheshire, Trowbridge and Valley Townships
TRUESTREAM (GLE)	Great Lakes Energy is building fiber to their electric customers

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

123NET PROJECT STATUS



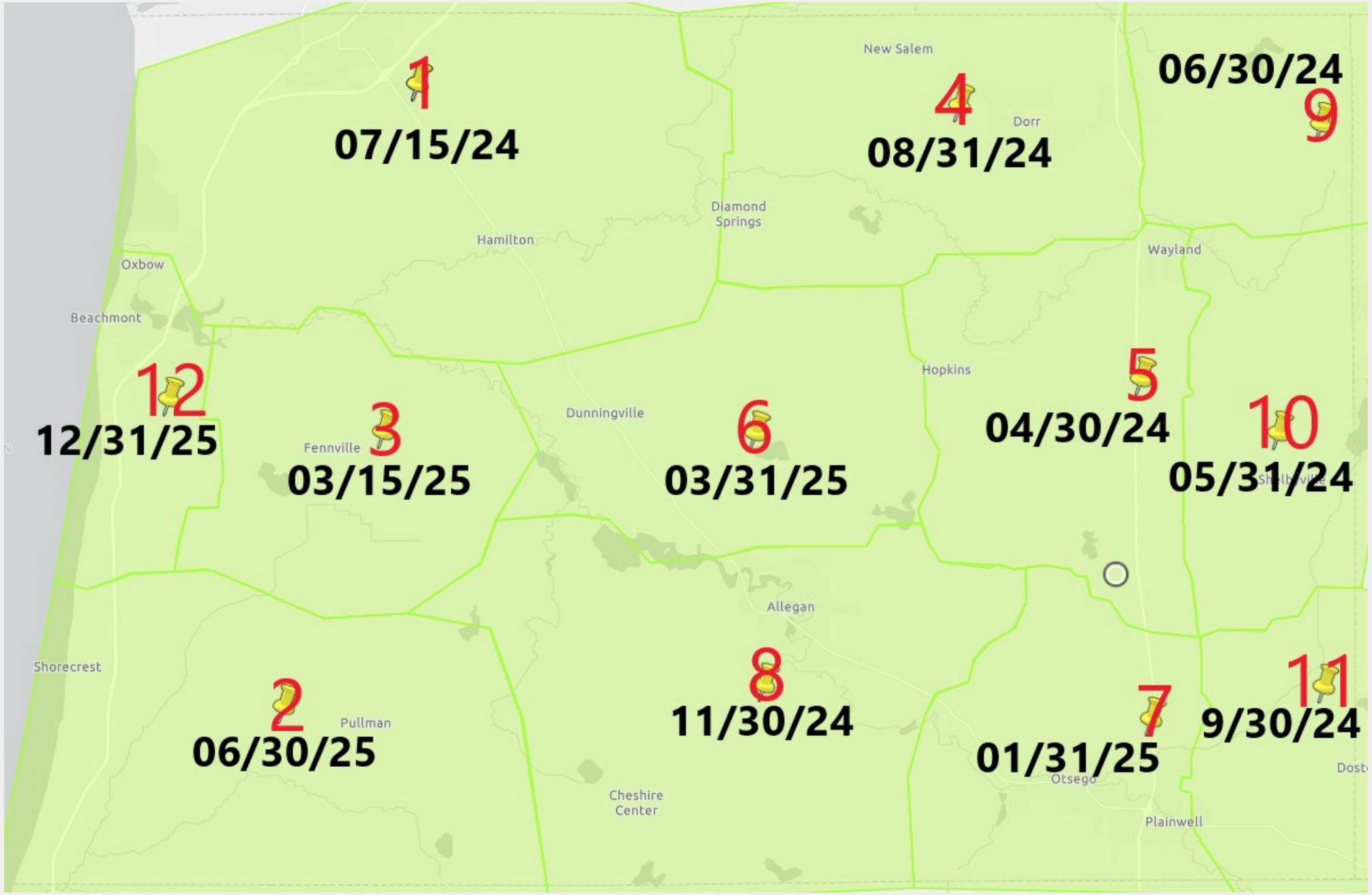
CONDUIT MILES



CONDUIT %

RESIDENTS WITH ACCESS

123NET ZONE MAP AND ESTIMATED DATES



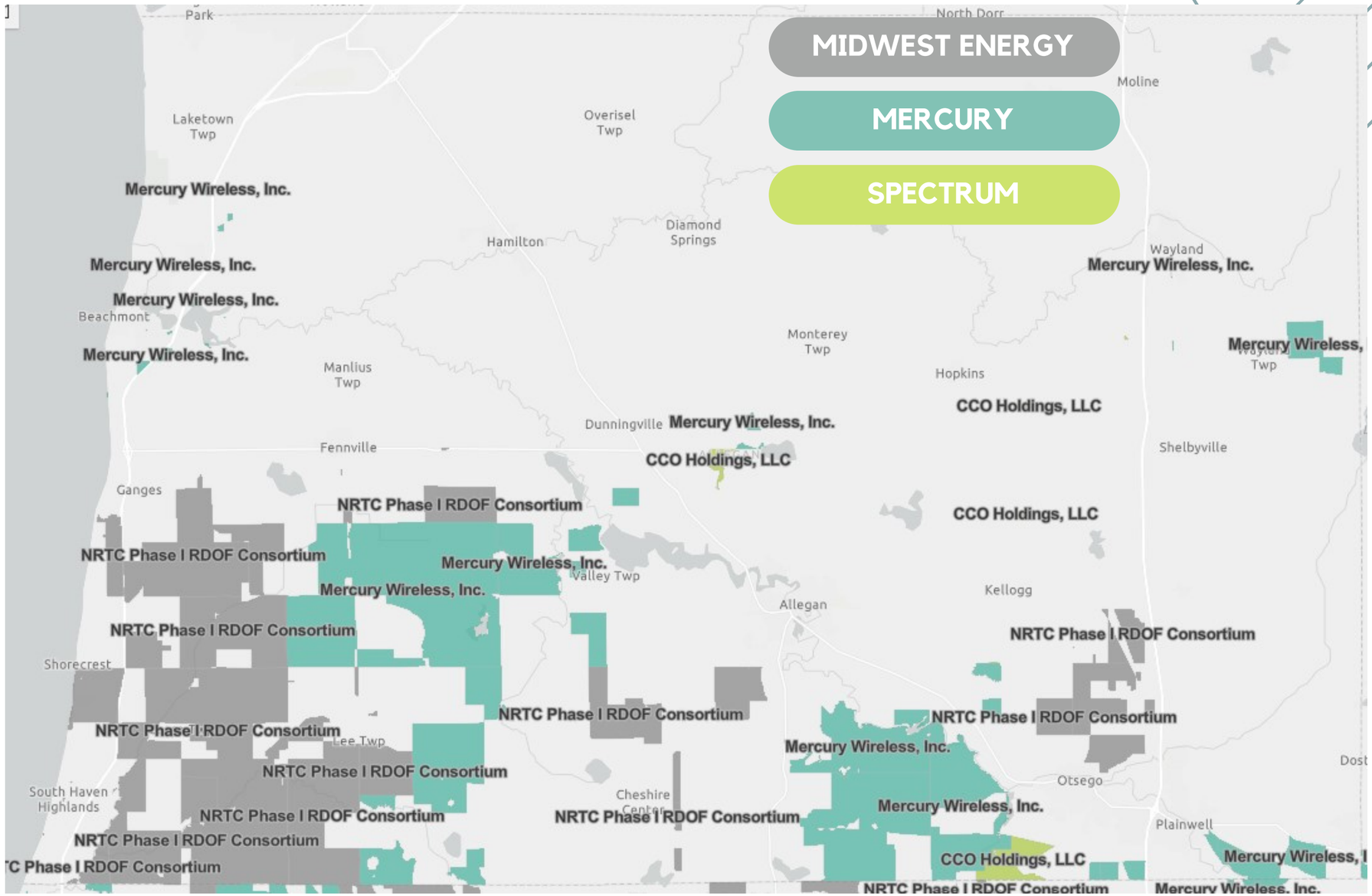
These dates are ONLY for 123Net Project!

RDOF UPDATE

Midwest Energy is under construction in Casco Township, moving up into Ganges and over to Lee and Clyde in 2024. Two more phases in 2025 and 2026.
www.teammidwest.com/internet

Mercury dates have slipped from 2023, to 2024, to now 2025.
www.mercurybroadband.com

Spectrum plans to build their portion in 2024 and informed us they will build approximately 30% more than the addresses awarded in RDOF.
spectrumruralexpansion.com



OTHER CARRIER UPDATES

AT&T	Bloomingdale Communications	Comcast	Frontier	Great Lakes Energy Truestream	Surf Internet
Potential for expansion out of the AT&T Hopkins office. Nothing confirmed. www.att.com or 888-371-0706.	Build in Cheshire, Trowbridge and Valley Townships underway and expected to be completed in 2024. https://bloomingdalecom.com/	Continual expansion of service based on business case evaluation. Service area is western shore of the county. www.xfinity.com	No current fiber build plans here. Check fiber availability and/or register that they are interested in having service: www.frontier.com/myfiber	Long term plan to offer fiber internet to all GLE customers with Truestream. www.truestreamfiber.com	Discussion of partnering with 123Net to served their existing FWA (Fixed Wireless Access) customers in Allegan County. https://surfinternet.com/

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www.allegancounty.org/broadband