

## GROWING THE ECONOMY

### Connectivity: Municipal Broadband Bonding

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- **WHAT:** The Governor, in coordination with the Public Service Department (PSD), proposes to allow municipalities to use general obligation bonding in limited circumstances for infrastructure development in areas that currently lack broadband.
- **WHY:** Currently, about 94 percent of locations in Vermont are served with broadband of 4/1 Mbps service or better and 73.4 percent of locations in the state have service available of 25/3 Mbps or better. PSD works with communities and telecommunications carriers to find ways to expand rural broadband service. The Telecommunications and Connectivity Division at PSD promotes investments in telecommunications infrastructure and services through regulatory advocacy, data collection, and the Connectivity Initiative Grant Program. However, there is still more work to do to bring greater levels of connectivity to Vermonters.

Communities are seeking ways to fund the expansion of broadband facilities. While there are federal grant and loan programs, they do not necessarily align with community goals and often require matching support. Towns may currently bond for telecommunications infrastructure but are limited to revenue bonds. In the areas that currently lack broadband, revenues alone cannot support the repayment of the loan obligations. This proposal would address that and provides towns a viable tool for financing new broadband facilities.

- **HOW:** PSD proposes a series of statutory changes to make general obligation bonding available for broadband development in areas that currently do not have broadband. This statutory change would most benefit towns working to use the Rural Economic Development Infrastructure districts to build fiber networks.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Connectivity: Make Permanent Section 248a



- **WHAT:** The Public Service Department (PSD) proposes to make a section of the telecommunications siting law, Section 248a, permanent. Section 248a allows communication carriers to quickly obtain permits to build cell towers and the law sunsets this year (2019).
- **WHY:** This will support continued development of telecommunications/connectivity infrastructure. By establishing Section 248a as a permanent mechanism for siting wireless facilities, Vermont will continue to have a state permitting framework that supports rapid deployment of new wireless infrastructure, such as the role-out of 5G capable technologies.

In addition, if 248a sunsets, the only remaining path for permitting telecommunications towers will be through local zoning. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is actively seeking to preempt local zoning laws in order to speed connectivity buildout in areas of the country that are lagging, such as Vermont. Section 248a is largely compatible and compliant with FCC requirements.

- **HOW:** This will involve striking the sunset date from statute.

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