Moulder expects county to recover broadband investment

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Scott Moulder
Oconee County Administrator

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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WALHALLA — While there is no timetable set, Oconee County Administrator Scott Moulder said Friday that he expects the county to recoup the $3.8 million investment in its broadband internet project.

"It may be five years before we recover the $3.8 million; it may be eight years if nobody uses this thing," Moulder said. "It all depends on the usage of this system."

Moulder said efforts are in the final stages to set the rate structures to sell broadbrand rights to wholesale customers who will provide the service to residential and business customers. He said he expects to be ready to sell to wholesale customers in the next 30 days.

"I have at least five ISPs (internet service providers) right now that have been bugging me for the last I don't know how many months to hurry up and get ready," Moulder said. "We are in a hurry because we have a lot of people interested. We have some, (but) whether it is enough to carry the whole system to make it profitable, I don't know. We'll have to wait and see. But I think as it gets up and going and we get more and more people on it, you'll get more and more interest.

"We've been setting up the business components with the balance sheets and getting all the administrative functions set up to start operating it like a business," he added. "It'll take a little time. That's kind of what we're building right now, the business projections, and determining what would the rate need to be to recover a certain cost structure during a certain time frame."

Moulder said work is also being done to complete work to make broadband internet available at all county fire stations.

"All of the fire stations will have it, but they don't yet," Moulder said. "There's still some work to do. We're hoping to have it done in the next three weeks, by the end of August — that's still our goal. Everybody keeps wanting me to put a definite timeline on it, but we can't. We're moving as fast as we can. It should be sometime this month."

BROADBAND: Service 'definitely faster'

FROM PAGE A1

Oconee Sheriff Mike Crenshaw said he is hoping to use internet service at fire stations and schools across the county to allow deputies to be able to file reports in their assigned zones, which will keep them out in the county more often.

"Most all the deputies have laptops, so if they can have access to an internet connection through the broadband it keeps them in their assigned zones, giving us a greater presence in the county," Crenshaw said. "I met with the school district this week, and we're actually going to work with them to get access to be able to utilize the schools in the county. During the day I would prefer that the deputies do go to the schools to have a presence at the schools and utilize the internet service there."

Blair Hinson, branch manager of the Seneca branch of the Oconee County Public Library, said he has seen a difference in the quality of internet service since the libraries were connected to the broadband service this spring.

"It is definitely faster than it was before," Hinson said. "Most people, if they are getting on Facebook, Youtube, that kind of thing, I think it's working better for them than it was before."

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