

Co-op, partner set to buy fiber assets from local company

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
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SENECA — After announcing a partnership to offer a high-speed internet pilot program in October, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and West Carolina Telephone Cooperative officials are making a move to purchase fiber and broadband assets from a local company.

The two entities have submitted a joint letter

of intent to purchase Seneca-based One Tone Telecom's fiber and broadband network assets, which includes fiber installations and electronic equipment to support the network. Blue Ridge is working with WCFIBER, a subsidiary of the West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative based in Abbeville. Blue Ridge vice presi-

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FIBER: Speedy deal 'in all parties' best interests'

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dent of economic development and government relations Zach Hinton told The Journal there wasn't an exact timeline when



Hinton

the offer could be accepted, but that the process was moving "expeditiously."

"It's in all parties' best interests to get this closed soon," he said.

Blue Ridge, which services more than 67,000 members, has been adamant in the past it does not want customers to bear the costs of improved internet. In October, Blue Ridge officials said they expected construction projects could begin in some areas of service this spring, with installations potentially starting by the summer.

Blue Ridge president and CEO Jim Lovinggood said in a news release Wednesday the purchase would help provide internet service to Oconee County residents more quickly.

"We have known from the beginning that this would be a long-term process," he said.

"However, the addition of OneTone's fiber assets will reduce that schedule by several years."

OneTone president and CEO Scott Loggins added the partnership would "exponentially" grow internet service locally.

"We believe that Blue Ridge and WCFIBER can take our infrastructure and grow it exponentially in outlying communities," he said. "Our company started with the mindset of providing state-of-the-art broadband services in Oconee County."

Representatives from the agencies involved spoke in executive session at an Oconee County Council meeting Tuesday night to discuss the broadband network called "Oconee Focus."

"I think any partnership between a private entity and a cooperative in the spirit of expanding services to citizens — whether that be electricity, broadband or other infrastructure network opportunities — is a great thing," Oconee County administrator Amanda Brock told The Journal on Wednesday.