

NEWS RELEASE

Ilene Shapiro – Summit County Executive
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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County Executive details largest ever investment, development of Summit Connects

SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO—On Monday, June 13, 2022, Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro will introduce legislation to County Council outlining plans to build and operate Summit Connects, a high-speed and secure broadband public safety network. The network will initially consist of a 125-mile fiber optic cable ring connecting Summit County and all its 31 city, village and township governments to gigabit speed internet service, and a data center. Included in the legislation to be presented is a cooperative agreement between Summit County and the City of Fairlawn, formalizing the partnership and entity that will eventually own and operate the data center and fiber ring. The development of Summit Connects is largely funded through the County’s allocation of federal American Rescue Plan Act monies.

“The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the growing digital divide present in Summit County, Ohio and the entire nation. Summit County and our 31 local governments are all in agreement. We need better internet options to provide the best public safety and other government services to our residents,” said County Executive Shapiro. “Summit Connects is a home-grown, cost-effective solution that meets the needs of our local communities.”

The preliminary intent of the network is to provide a high-speed, secure and affordable broadband platform to host each community’s public safety operations. The network will be serviced by FairlawnGig, one of the nation’s most successful municipal broadband utilities, owned and operated by the City of Fairlawn. Once construction begins, the County expects the fiber ring and data center to be operational by 2025. In the second phase of the project, the County will work with local communities to explore the feasibility of expanding Summit Connects through internet service providers to residents, businesses, schools and other interested entities.

“The American Rescue Plan Act has granted Summit County a once in a lifetime opportunity to make targeted investments in local infrastructure. In addition to funding critical water and sewer projects, ARPA funds are empowering us to position our county for the future,” said County Council President Elizabeth Walters. “Summit Connects will help us achieve our long-term economic, educational and social development goals and strategic plans.”

In announcing the plans, County Executive Shapiro highlighted the need for a reliable, efficient, and secure internet network to host public safety and other government operations. Currently, local governments

are as limited as consumers when selecting an internet provider, and like consumers, their geographical location can limit access to the highest speeds. Data provided by BroadbandOhio and the Ohio Department of Development show 11% of Summit County's populated area lacks access to the minimum levels of upload and download speeds. Additionally, smaller communities may lack financial means to access the highest quality service needed to optimize their operations.

"The City of Fairlawn is excited to partner with Executive Shapiro, President Walters and my fellow mayors and trustees to enhance public safety for all 540,000 Summit County residents. Building this critical infrastructure today will make our County safer tomorrow, and open doors for future innovation," said Mayor Bill Roth. "We have significant experience building and operating a broadband utility and look forward to sharing our knowledge with our partners throughout this project."

Once operational, Summit Connects will enable the County and all 31 communities to reduce collective costs through consolidation and use of a single data center. Most importantly, the network will enhance public safety for every resident in the County. Summit Connects will provide a reliable, secure, and interoperable public safety communications platform. This platform will provide redundancy and enhance information sharing and interoperability for all 31 Summit County communities during emergencies and day-to-day operations. In addition, the data center will consolidate essential services such as data storage, data backup, disaster recovery, data security, and co-location of services. It will also add value to other technological investments made by the County in the past two years such as the virtual courtroom, consolidated computer-aided dispatch, the regional dispatch center, and jail case management.

The County will fund the anticipated \$35 million cost of the fiber ring design and construction with a portion of its federal American Rescue Plan allocation and will invest approximately \$22 million of County General Capital Improvement Funds to pay for the design, construction and operating reserves of the data center. On Monday, June 13, County Executive Shapiro will introduce legislation to award contracts to two firms for design services. She is requesting a contract with The Thrasher Group for design of the fiber ring and a contract with Mann Parsons Gray Architects for the design of the data center. Both contracts will not exceed \$100,000. Fairlawn recently introduced legislation to its City Council to enable the creation of a Council of Governments to operate and maintain the fiber ring and data center.

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