

Published August 02, 2009 11:13 pm - CBN Connect plans to apply for between \$25 million and \$40 million for construction of a broadband network to serve Clinton, Franklin and Essex counties.

## Local broadband project to seek stimulus funds

By **DAN HEATH**

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PLATTSBURGH — A local broadband network under development will apply for funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

CBN Connect Inc. is a private, nonprofit corporation working to build a community broadband network in Clinton, Franklin and Essex counties.

Howard Lowe, director of the Technical Assistance Center at Plattsburgh State and president of the corporation, said it plans to apply for between \$25 million and \$40 million in stimulus funds.

That money could be in the form of grants, grant/loan combinations or loans from \$2.5 billion available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service.

"That would allow us to build out the majority of the fiber-optic network we have the design for," Lowe said.

CBN Connect is eligible to apply to that program because the area is more than 75 percent rural and lacks sufficient access to high-speed Internet that could stimulate economic development.

In a news release, Sen. Charles Schumer urged localities to apply for the funding. Applications are due by Aug. 14.

"The availability of broadband, in a world that is increasingly reliant on high-speed, easily accessible Internet, is now more important than ever.

"Universal high-speed Internet access is critical to rebuilding rural economies, like those in Upstate New York, as wireless networks enable entrepreneurship to flourish and attract new types of cutting-edge, high-tech business."

Schumer also urged USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to maximize the use of grants rather than loans in funding projects, to avoid burdening those looking to create broadband networks.

Lowe said CBN Connect is coordinating its application with the New York State Office for Technology.

"I believe we have their support. We would reach a lot of underserved businesses and organizations in our area."

Lowe was named to the New York State Council for Universal Broadband in 2007. There, he has helped craft the state's strategy to achieve that goal, which is focused on the opportunity presented through stimulus funding.

CBN Connect is a nearly 500-mile fiber-optic network with an estimated price of \$35 million.

It has already received more than \$7.6 million in grants from the Federal Communications Commission's Telemedicine Rural Health Care Pilot Program to connect the Adirondack Champlain Telemedicine Information Network, a group of seven hospitals and colleges.

The system would be open to Internet-service providers, who have supported the idea. It would also support extension of cell-phone and wireless coverage through the region.

Funding is expected to start being awarded no later than Sept. 30, 2010. Projects that receive funding are expected to be complete within three years.

The project has had widespread support from community leaders from the start, Lowe said.

"We're very excited about this opportunity. I think we're going to have a competitive application."

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