

Laurel Ridge

Property Owners' Association, Inc.

1 Sugar Maple Drive, Black Mountain, NC 28711

August 17, 2018

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 S.W. Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: State of Fixed Broadband Competition, GN Docket No. 18-231

Mr. Chairman:

The rural community of Laurel Ridge is attempting to obtain modern broadband services. Laurel Ridge is a residential housing development of approximately 85 single family homes, with a total 190 lots. I am writing this letter to seek your help in achieving this goal.

Laurel Ridge is nestled between two mountain ridges about ten minutes outside of the small town of Black Mountain, North Carolina. The community requires the use of modern broadband. Because it is located a relatively long distance from medical facilities, reliable communications are essential in emergencies. There is a remote fire station for the Town of Black Mountain located in our community, which serves our mountain community, and is in need of broadband facilities like many first responder locations. Many community residents work at home and thus require broadband connections for their livelihoods. Our children need broadband in order to communicate with their schools.

In the early days of the development, approximately 1995 through 2000, AT&T installed a network node within the community and ran buried copper lines throughout the development. From its network facilities, AT&T offered voice and broadband services, which for most in the community was based on Digital Subscriber Line (“DSL”) service of no greater than 3 Mbps download. No cable TV provider wired the neighborhood.

Over the years, AT&T’s network facilities became seriously outmoded. AT&T has not upgraded this service even though it has laid fiber to the base of the community and provides its U-Verse service throughout the Town of Black Mountain and in many other locations in Buncombe County, North Carolina. AT&T has represented to the Federal Communications Commission that it provides 6 Mbps broadband service to the census blocks of Laurel Ridge; almost no one receives this level of service from AT&T. Our community’s census blocks are 3702131041000, 1002, 1006, 1008, and 1011. From AT&T’s Form 477 data filed with the Commission, AT&T shows that it delivers

broadband at only 768/384 kbps in blocks 1000 and 1011, and 6/1 Mbps in the remaining Laurel Ridge blocks. The National Broadband Map states that our neighborhood receives 6 Mbps service. We know from experience that virtually no one receives 6/1 Mbps service, and now AT&T will no longer add new DSL subscribers in the Laurel Ridge neighborhood when new residents contact AT&T.

No cable TV provider has been willing to date to build its network out to the Laurel Ridge community, although Charter has laid fiber and coaxial facilities in many other places in Black Mountain and the rest of Buncombe county. Some residents can receive fairly robust service (max 15/3 Mbps) from Skyrunner, a Wireless Internet Service Provider. However, because of the community's location between two mountain ridges, many residents cannot obtain reliable service from Skyrunner.

Cellular telephone service is woefully inadequate in Laurel Ridge and there are few homes within the line of sight of any cellular towers. Verizon provides the best service, but AT&T and T-Mobile wireless service are almost non-existent in our neighborhood. Some residents have been successful in using network extenders to obtain cellular service at their homes, but these utilize broadband facilities, which as I've mentioned are deteriorating rapidly.

Some residents have attempted to obtain broadband services through satellite providers. Their experience has been extremely poor, the bandwidth availability unreliable, they are unable to stream video, and those services are often unavailable until very late at night.

I understand that many areas of the country are seeking improved broadband service. I also understand that sometimes it takes time to build out expensive networks. However, many of our residents moved into a community where AT&T represented that it provided broadband, only to find out that it was not updating its network as communications needs changed, and that it appears to be in the process of abandoning the community.

We understand that the Federal Communications Commission has been establishing policies to promote the availability of broadband at the speed of 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload. However, we know of nothing in the Commission's policies that addresses the situation of Laurel Ridge. For instance, Laurel Ridge census blocks were excluded from the offer of universal service fund monies, we believe in part because the FCC's Form 477 database erroneously indicates that 6 Mbps service is provided to our community.

We ask your support in helping our community receive modern broadband facilities.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jerry Morris

Jerry Morris

President, Laurel Ridge Property Owner's Association

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