

# NEWS FROM THE ULSTER COUNTY OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER

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## ULSTER COUNTY CITIZENS COMMISSION FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION CHALLENGES FCC BROADBAND MAP

*Kingston, NY (January 20, 2023)* -- Ulster County successfully submitted a bulk challenge to the Federal Communications Commission Broadband map. The challenge, led by the Comptroller's Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion, identified 435 lack of service challenges and 165 missing location challenges. Thirteen towns in Ulster County have some areas that still lack access to cable fiber broadband.

In addition to preparing cable fiber broadband mapping that supported the bulk challenge, the Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion also provided consultation with town supervisors and one-on-one support for thirty-two individual FCC broadband challenges. A recent Shawangunk Journal article enabled eight people to contact the Commission for support, seven more came from social media posts, and six by word of mouth. Of the thirty-two individual challenges, none had wired service, twenty-seven had satellite service through HughesNet, and five used hot spots.

The Ulster County Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion is also pleased to announce the election of Jenny Lee as Chair. Her unfailing dedication has aided the Commission in facilitating constituents' challenges against the FCC's broadband map, and her committed assistance in the research and development of best practices, mapping, have furthered the Commission's goals towards bridging the broadband divide in Ulster County. Chair Lee represents her Denning community, where she is also a volunteer firefighter. She is an accomplished sculptor and professor at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and has worked as a researcher, designer, and fabricator in diverse work settings.

"Jenny Lee's leadership has enabled the Commission to provide support to Ulster County residents in filing challenges for internet service when the challenge process itself required people to use the very service they lack," said Comptroller March Gallagher. "Jenny Lee's previous experience spearheading the identification of broadband gaps in Denning, and her keen research and technical skills make her a tremendous asset in seeking full last mile build out for Ulster County. Working with Ulster County's Geographic Information System team the Commission was able to ensure that federal maps identify our local needs."

County Executive Jen Metzger stated, "I want to commend the Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion and County Comptroller March Gallagher for their important work to identify gaps in broadband service across our County, and correct flaws in federal broadband mapping. High-speed internet service is not a luxury in today's world--it is essential to accessing educational and job opportunities, healthcare, and other vital needs--and my administration is committed to working with the County Comptroller's Citizens Commission to expand connectivity and close the gaps. I want to congratulate Denning resident and broadband champion Jenny Lee on her much-deserved election as Chair of the Commission, and thank her for her tremendous contributions to the Commission's work to date."

"Comptroller Gallagher has assembled a dedicated and diverse team and I am excited to continue our work together in my new capacity," stated Chair Lee. "Ulster County, especially our rural communities, has been overlooked by internet providers. In addition to a lack of broadband access, a common theme that emerged during our challenge support process was consumers' frustration in negotiating with broadband providers that predominantly operate as monopolies. Consumers are disadvantaged when there is no competition as companies can raise prices and reduce services without consequence."

"As a library director in Phoenicia, a rural vortex of poor connectivity and a complete cellular dead zone, I was overjoyed when Comptroller Gallagher convened the Broadband Commission in 2022," said Phoenicia Library Director and Commission Member Liz Potter. "Since 2015, I have dreamt of providing free WiFi to Main Street in Phoenicia. We have students, retirees, travelers, and workers who crowd our library simply to get a signal on their phones. The Commission members met with Margaretville Telephone, which has since presented a plan for high-speed WiFi for Main Street to the Phoenicia Business Association. Because of this Commission we are one step closer to reliable access to the internet all along our commercial district. Much has yet to be worked out, but this is a testimony that when businesses, concerned citizens, and determined officials like Shandaken Town Board Member Robert Drake come together, the gates of progress can be opened."

The mission of the Comptroller's Citizens Commission for Digital Inclusion is to bring universal connectivity to all Ulster County residents and businesses with equitable, affordable access to high-speed cable fiber broadband and cellular service. The Commission will make digital access information public to inform policy discussions to improve infrastructure through public private partnerships.

For more information, please visit:

<https://comptroller.ulstercountyny.gov/audit-reports/broadband-resources-citizens-commission-digital-inclusion>

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