

# Press Release



Media Contact: Rebecca Agner, 252.290.1475, [ragner@wilsonnc.org](mailto:ragner@wilsonnc.org)

## **Wilson City Council approves temporary Greenlight solution for Pinetops and Vick Family Farms**

*Action will provide no-fee internet and phone in affected areas  
for a six-month period while law is changed*

**Oct. 20, 2016** – The Wilson City Council voted tonight to provide limited Greenlight service to customers outside of Wilson County at no charge for up to six months, a measure that will prevent disconnection of customers in the town of Pinetops and Vick Family Farms. Without this action, these customers would have been disconnected on Oct. 28, 2016.

The Council action was tied to a commitment by N.C. Rep. Susan Martin and N.C. Sen. Harry Brown to draft and support legislation to change the current law in the 2017 session of the North Carolina General Assembly.

“While the short term fix is not perfect, it was the only alternative we had to disconnecting our neighbors,” said Wilson Mayor Bruce Rose. “Taking broadband service from the people of Pinetops would have been a terrible blow, especially when they are still recovering from Hurricane Matthew.”

In September, the Wilson City Council reluctantly approved a motion to disconnect all non-Wilson County customers on October 28 in order to comply with state law limiting the provision of fee-based municipal broadband to its county limits. For months, the City and Greenlight customers in the affected areas have been tirelessly working to find alternatives to termination of service.

Existing Greenlight customers in the affected areas will receive internet and phone service only during the six-month period. Cable service will be disconnected as planned on Oct. 28. The cost of cable service is too prohibitive to allow a no-fee arrangement.

“Our broadband utility has always been about bringing critical infrastructure to people, improving lives and communities,” said Grant Goings, Wilson City Manager. “We cannot imagine being forced to disconnect people and businesses that need our services. We are thankful that, in partnership with our phone service provider, we have identified a way to keep folks connected while Rep. Martin and Sen. Brown work to fix this broken State law.”

Greenlight infrastructure has already been installed in the affected areas, meaning there is no additional infrastructure cost incurred by leaving the service active. In addition, Greenlight’s private sector voice and internet partners have agreed to provide discounted services for up to six months in areas negatively impacted by the current state law.

City Attorney Jim Cauley informed the City Council that the no-fee arrangement complies with the 2011 broadband law. Cauley recommended that he and Goings keep a close eye on the legislation's progress once the General Assembly convenes on January 11, 2017 so that the City could confirm that it is progressing.

## **Background**

Under legislation adopted the North Carolina General Assembly's 2011 session, municipalities like Wilson are barred from offering broadband services except in very limited circumstances. Wilson's Greenlight system was already built and serving customers when the legislation passed, after years of unsuccessful attempts to partner with a telecom partner to offer broadband in the city. The legislation allows Wilson to operate Greenlight only within Wilson County.

In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission ruled that a federal law encouraging the extension of broadband into underserved areas preempted North Carolina's law. The FCC ruling allowed Wilson to provide broadband to customers within its electric service area, a five-county region.

Earlier this year, Wilson extended Greenlight to Pinetops in Edgecombe County and Vick Farms, a large family farm that employs nearly 300 people just over the Wilson County line in Nash County, pursuant to the FCC ruling.

On August 10, 2016, the United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the FCC had exceeded its authority in preempting the North Carolina statutes. That ruling put the 2011 NC law back in place. The NC law requires Wilson to cease selling Greenlight services to Pinetops and Vick by October 28 or risk having to shut down all of Greenlight.

Greenlight currently serves more than 200 residential and commercial customers in Pinetops, as well as providing broadband access to schools and public buildings.

Vick Family Farms uses Greenlight service in its highly-automated food-processing operation, specifically to comply with food safety requirements mandated by many international customers. Vick Farms owns more than 7,000 acres and is one of the top ten highest volume packing facilities in the state, supplying sweet potatoes to seven countries.