

Elmore County Commission

Kenny Holt
District 1

Troy Stubbs
Chairman, District 3

Bart Mercer
District 4

Mack Daugherty
District 2

Earl Reeves
District 5



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Partnership Yields Broadband Hotspot Opportunities and Interactive Map

The Elmore County Commission in partnership with the Elmore County Board of Education (ECBOE), Elmore County Economic Authority (ECEDA), our municipalities, and Central Access announces the release of an interactive map of public broadband hotspots available in the county. With the assistance of Central Access, additional public hotspot locations that are soon to be available are also included on the map.

The genesis of the discussions was predicated by the onset of the COVID-19 virus and the availability of public Wi-Fi hotspots. Elmore County Board of Education Superintendent Richard Dennis contacted the County Commission to seek assistance to identify ways to reach his student population remotely. When this contact was made, the County Commission was able to share about their active engagement with ECEDA for the last eighteen months developing a broadband plan for the entire county. With the assistance of ECEDA's consultant, Sain and Associates, the County Commission and ECEDA have been utilizing data captured in the plan to identify weaknesses and strengths in the county's broadband infrastructure network. With the study in hand, the partnership moved swiftly to identify currently available public hotspots and the interest of many countywide resources who would entertain hosting a potential hotspot. During the gathering of this data, several municipalities expanded access to their facilities as public hotspots as well as Spectrum sharing their data of currently available public hotspots. These hotspots are designed to allow citizens to be able to access the free broadband connection from the safety of their vehicle at the specified locations allowing proper social distancing measures to be observed.

Central Alabama Electric Cooperative and its broadband company, Central Access, have been a valuable asset to the group during the study process and during the hotspot discussion. When the Elmore County Commission, ECEDA, and ECBOE, brought this issue to the partnership, Central Access stepped up to help expand the availability of public hotspots.

Currently, there are 63 public hotspots available throughout the county between Central Access, Spectrum, municipal, ECBOE and other community sites. Plans are in place to increase the public hotspot opportunities to close to 100 sites over the next several months. To view the available and future public hotspots, the partnership has developed a digital map hosted on the Elmore County Commission website. The map is available on the Elmore County Commission website (www.elmoreco.org) at <https://elmorecounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=3bae3df6f3864cafbf28a01cf01cee70>. As additional public hotspots come online, the map will be updated so citizens have access to the most current set of active and available sites.

With the uncertainty of the COVID-19 crisis timeline, these public hotspots give parents and their students options for safe and social distance compliant access to educational tools. Moving forward, these public hotspots have the potential to provide many other opportunities related to areas such as telehealth, workforce resources, public safety, emergency response, and additional access to county and municipal services/ resources. Should you have any questions related to this effort and the digital map tool, please contact Cary Cox at cary.cox@elmoreeda.com or Richie Beyer at wrbechd@elmoreco.org.