

Getting the Best from your Cable Provider

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Fairfax County Department of Cable and Consumer Services
Communications Policy & Regulation Division

LLI/NOVA (Zoom Class)

June 8, 2021

Today's Agenda

- 1) Background - County cable franchises, regulations and roles
- 2) Billing, video signal & construction issues - How best to get them resolved
- 3) Ways to lower your cable bill – Ideas on negotiating the best deal
- 4) Alternative - Watching TV (Video) over the Internet (OTT)
- 5) Alternative - Getting local channels using a TV antenna over the air (OTA)
- 6) Ways to lower your Internet bill (aimed at low-income and COVID relief):
 - Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)
 - Low-Cost provider programs: Comcast “Internet Essentials”; Cox’s “Connect to Compete”; Verizon’s “Lifeline”

The County's Cable Franchises

- Each cable company operates under a **non-exclusive** “franchise” granted by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.
- “**Cable Franchise Agreement**” pursuant to County, State and Federal law

These public documents can be viewed on-line at
www.FairfaxCounty.gov/cable

Cable Providers in the County

- **Comcast** (Reston area)
- **Cox** (County-wide, ex-Reston)
- **Verizon** County-wide

*Exceptions include: low density, easement or access not available (e.g., HOA refusal), topography or other technical constraints.

What the County Cannot Regulate or Control

- **Rates** charged by cable providers
- Channel lineup or “**tiers**”
- Television **programming** or program content (whether desirable or “objectionable”)
- **Broadcast television**: regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- Voice (**telephone**) service: regulated by the State Corporation Commission (SCC), & FCC
- **Internet**: FCC’s recent Network Neutrality orders

Regulations: Customer Service

- **Telephone Answering Standards**
 - Standard: maximum of 30 seconds for call to be answered and for subsequent transfers to customer service representatives. Must be met 90% of the time (averaged per quarter).
- **Installation of Service**
 - Perform cable installations within 7 days after order is placed: 95% (averaged per quarter)
 - Not cancel appointments after the close of business on the previous business day: 95% (averaged)

Regulations: Cable Bills & Notices

- **Bill Format:** must be clear, concise and understandable [47 C.F.R. § 76.1619(a)]
- **Notification:** rate, channel and programming changes -- 30 days in advance [47 C.F.R. § 76.1603(b); County Code § 9.1-6-1(b)]

Regulations: Complaints

- **Procedures:** Cable provider must provide billing and complaint procedures at certain times – installation, at least annually and any time upon request [47 C.F.R. § 76.1602(b)(6)]
- **Dispute Response Timeline:** Cable provider must respond to written complaints within 30 days
[47 C.F.R. § 76.1619(b)]

Billing Items

- **Seeing Fees Added on Bills (Cable):**
 - Verizon Regional Sports Network Fee (\$8.98)
 - Comcast Regional Sports Network Fee (\$8.75)
 - Comcast Broadcast TV Fee (\$6.00)
 - FiOS TV Broadcast TV Fee (\$6.49)
 - Cox Broadcast TV Surcharge (\$7.00) (“reflects increasing costs associated with the delivery of broadcast tv stations to our customers”)

Putting such costs below the line allow cable operators to raise the cost of service while leaving the advertised rate the same

Disputing Unauthorized Charges

- **Contact the Company:** Your first call should be to the cable company
- **Contact the County:** If issue cannot be resolved with company, contact the County. County will assist collecting relevant billing data, if necessary.
- **Process for Dispute:** FCC and SCC. Note that failure to pay disputed amounts may result in collection actions

Construction and Safety Inspections

The County's Role:

- Inspect cable construction site locations
- Require that cable construction and safety codes are met
- Work with cable providers to resolve service and safety issues
- Take enforcement actions where necessary

Construction and Safety Inspections

CPRD's cable inspectors

- ▶ Annually perform tens of thousands of cable construction site inspections
- ▶ Are dispatched within 3 to 24 hours to handle individual complaints



Typical Construction & Inspection Issues

- Easements:

- Digging in the right place? **Start by checking your homeowner's documents and deed** to determine exactly what existed at the time of purchase. Then, if still a concern, **ask crew to stop work** until they can provide documentation.
- Sometimes it may be necessary to **contact legal counsel, title examiner** or even a **surveyor**.

- Hazards and safety concerns
- Construction damage and restoration
- Signal quality
- Outages

Construction Activity



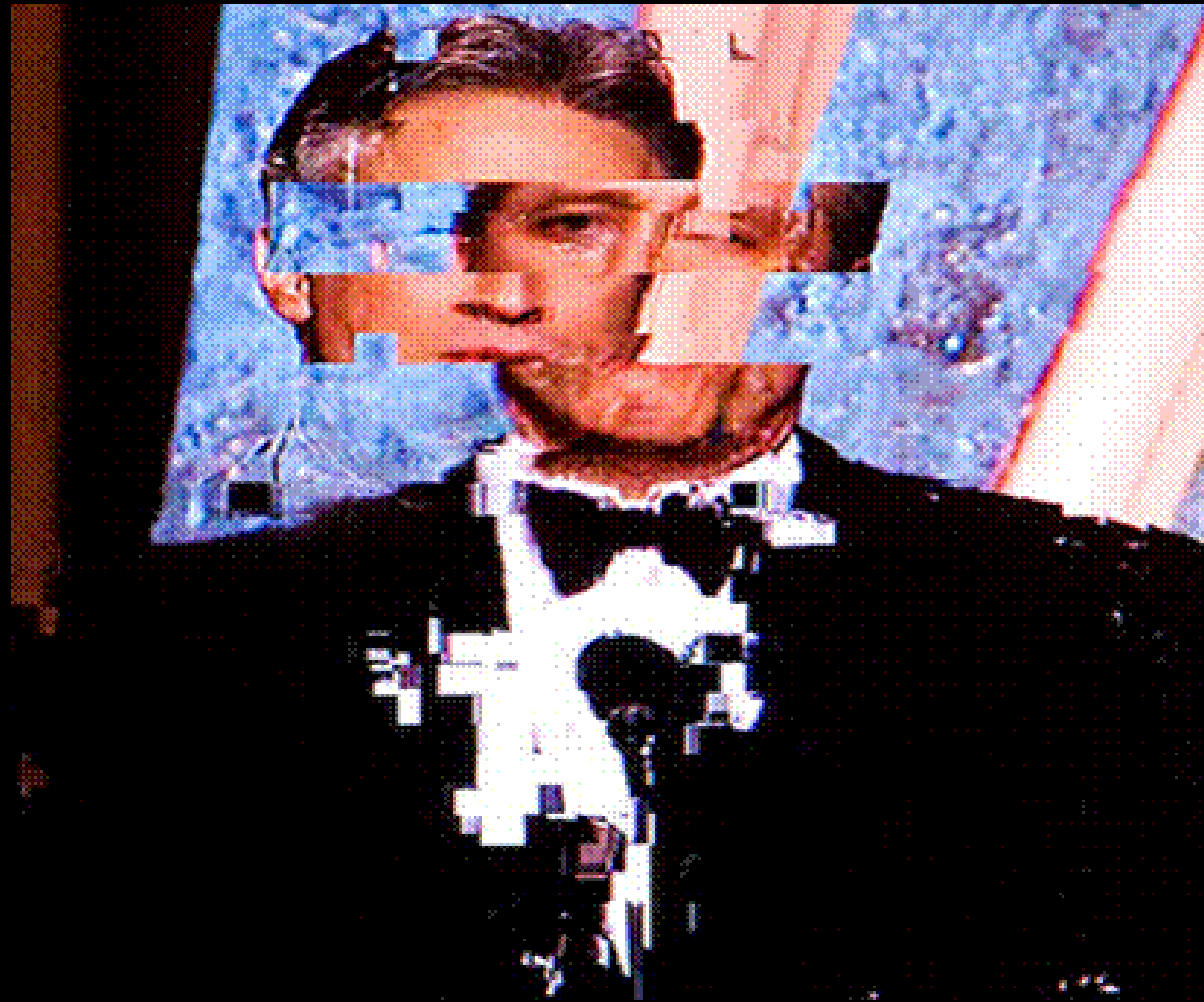
Easements and Digging



Hazards and Safety Concerns



Signal Quality



A Role for County Residents

- Have you noticed a safety issue? Let us know
- CPRD will dispatch an inspector to a location that has a possible safety, property damage, or restoration issue
- **Communications Policy and Regulation Division** (assists with cable-related problems and cable safety and construction issues)

Allan Hide or Doug Povich

- Call: 703-324-5902 or 324-4980 or 324-5920
- email: allan.hide@fairfaxcounty.gov or douglas.Povich@fairfaxcounty.gov

Lower Your Cable Bill

County has no authority to regulate rates. FCC also chooses not to and FCC declared “Effective Competition” in Fairfax County in 2007.

Try to get **promotional pricing (offers) from competitor** (not regular published rates), get promo prices in hand to negotiate best deal

Approach customer retention rep. or loyalty rep., not regular customer service rep. Switch provider if option!

AND /OR

Think about the channels you absolutely must have

Consider Switching source of channels: OTT, OTA

“OVER THE TOP” - INTERNET VIDEO

Why TV Over the Internet?

Most people have received video over cable in the past 30 years

Sources of dissatisfaction with cable:

- Rates
- Customer service
- Packaging of Programs

Therefore other sources for video are developing, including “over-the-top” (OTT) (video over the Internet)

Internet Video or Over-the-Top Video (OTT)

OTT is streaming video to your TV over the Internet. (movies, TV shows, clips, etc.)

OTT is often referred to as "over-the-top" because these services ride on top of the service you already get – **except you do need Internet service for it to work (usually from your cable provider)**

Can choose one channel e.g. Netflix or a package (similar to a cable tier) e.g, Slingbox TV to get programming or a "Buffet of Packages"

Internet Video From The Cable Company

Comcast, Cox, Verizon operate in Fairfax County

Cox Contour (in home) and **Cox “tve” TV Everywhere** (home) and TV Online

Cox: https://www.cox.com/residential/tv/tv-apps.html?sc_id=cr_dm_camp_z_tveverywhere_vanity

Verizon’s “Watch FiOS Now”

Verizon: www.verizon.com/tvonline

Comcast’s “TVGo” allow streaming of channels online and on demand

Comcast: <http://tvgo.xfinity.com/watch-live-tv>

Ways to Get TV Over the Internet (OTT Video)

Package Providers	Cost per month/Yr	Best for	Original Content
Netflix	\$8.99/mo Standard Definition \$14/mo for 4K UHD	Vast library of movies and TV shows	House of Cards, Orange is the New Black, "Stranger"
Acorn TV	\$5.99/mo or \$5/yr.	Lovers of British TV Fare.	Classic 80's comedies "Alfresco"
Amazon Prime TV	Free with Prime membership costing \$12.99/mo or \$119/yr. Prime video is \$8.99 extra	Anyone who's already paying Amazon prime membership.	"Z": The Beginning of Everything' and "Grand Tour", Exclusive "Downton Abbey"
CBS All Access	\$5.99/mo	Major network fare. Access to all CBS programming plus some live.	
Direc TV Now	25/mo (60 channels) – with cloud DVR	Anyone who wanted DirecTV without a satellite Dish.	Some local live TV in 75% of the country.
Drama Fever	\$4.99/mo or \$4.19/mo (annual contract)	Korean, Taiwanese dramas (w/Eng subtitles)	
Fubo TV Premier	\$64.99/mo (80 channels) also some live TV.	Sport fans. Also live TV. Free cloud DVR	
HBO Now	\$14.99/mo	Movies, series and documentaries.	
Hulu or Hulu Live	\$5.99/mo w/ads and \$12/mo without ads (with live TV \$40 per month)	Movies, series and documentaries	CBS, ABC, Fox, and NBX. "The Path" The Mermaids Tale"
Philo	\$16 per month \$4 for add on channel (37 channels)	Non sports.	
Playstation Vue	\$44.99 (90 channels)	Cable style TV package	
Showtime	\$10.99/mo	Cable network without cable.	"Homeland", "the Affair"
Sling TV	Orange costs \$30 per month		
Xfinity (Comcast)	Free to cable subscribers	TV on the go.	
Starz	\$8.99 per month		"Outlander" and "Power"
You Tube TV	\$64.99 per month, cloud DVR (up to 3 users) Local channels	Some live TV - Cable style package	

Devices That Get You TV over the Internet

Streaming Media

Devices (Boxes & Sticks):

Roku, Apple TV, TiVo, Amazon Fire, Google Chromecast, etc.



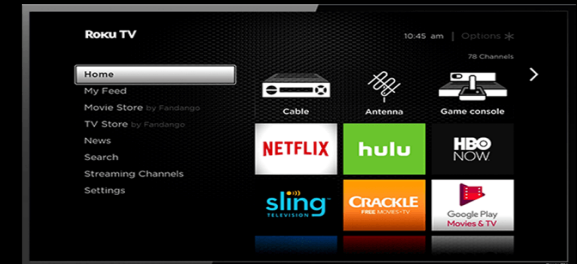
Blu-Ray Players & Game Boxes:

Samsung, Sony, LG, PS4, Xbox, Nintendo, etc.



Smart TVs:

Built in Roku TV, Amazon Fire TV, etc.



Laptops, Tablets, Cell Phones



SMART TVS to Get Internet TV Programming



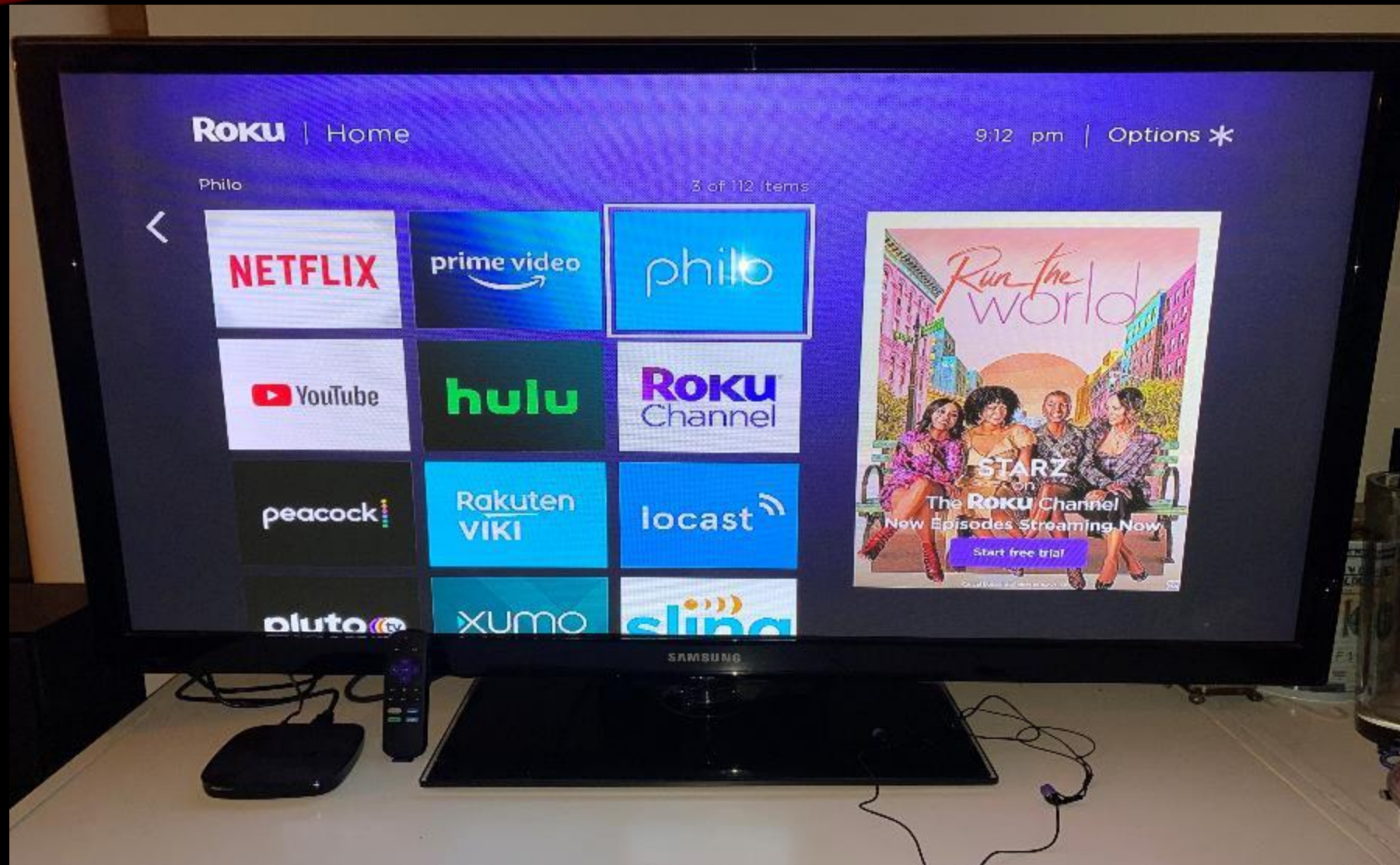
SMART TV – ICONS



SAMSUNG

1111

SMART TV WITH ROKU BOX ADDED



Netflix Menu

NETFLIX Arrivals Browse ▾

Kids

DVD

Search



allan ▾

New Releases



Recently added in Action & Adventure



Recently added in Children & Family Movies



Netflix New Release....ht...

Netflix.html

Show all downloads...

Peacock Menu – Free TV



YouTube Menu – free TV

Recently uploaded

Can't believe we pulled this off. OUR NEW BOAT! (Revealed)
Sailing La Vagabonde
73K views · 2 hours ago

Crossing into NAMIBIA [S5 - Eps. 38]
Itchy Boots
4K 110K views · 11 hours ago

How to make and grill veal burger patties - seminar video (EN subs) |
Grill philosophy
20K views · 4 days ago

Boat (Tall)
Samps
306K v

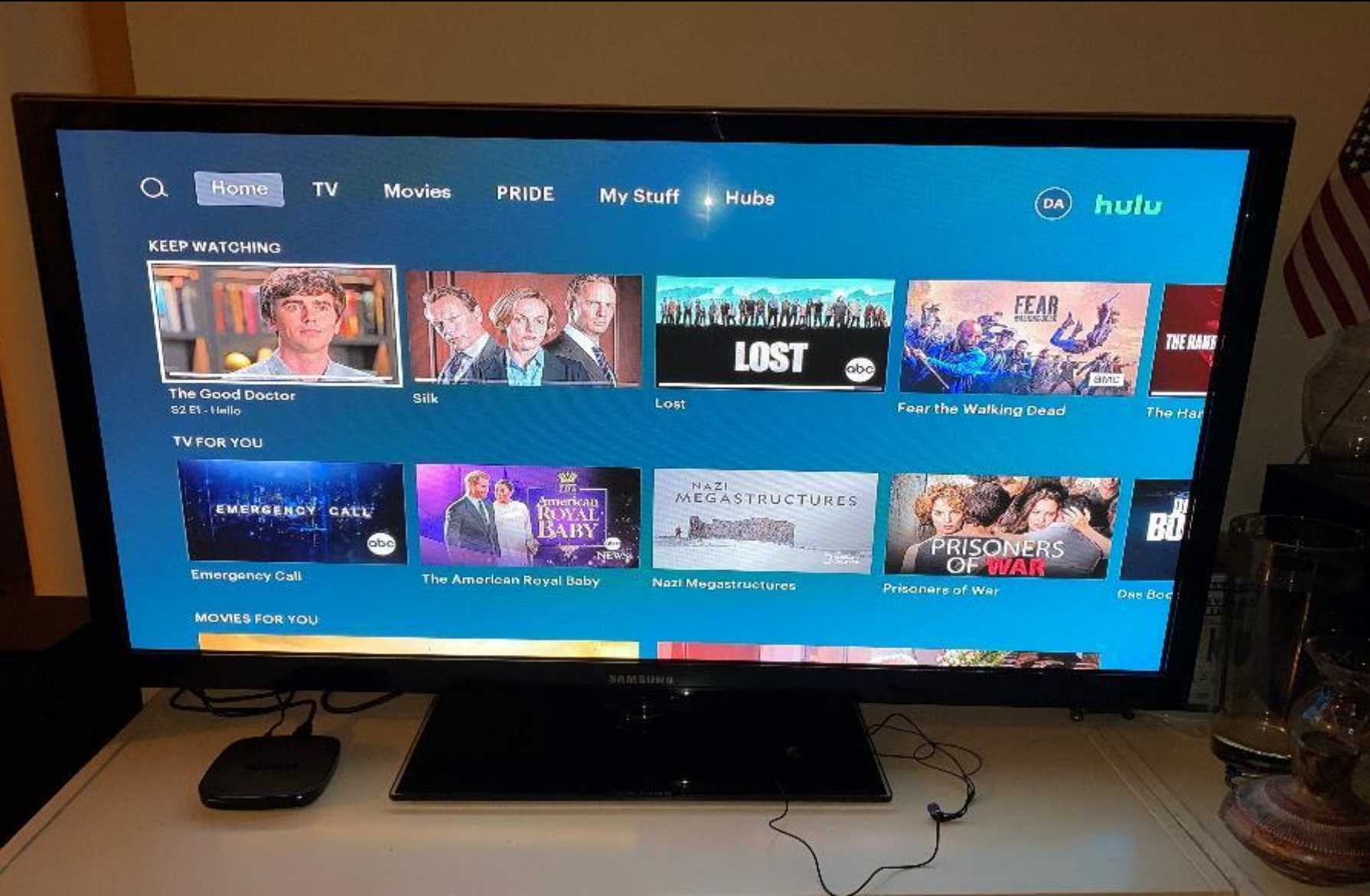
Discover more on YouTube

80 Birds

DO THIS!

BackM

Hulu Menu



ROKU Smart TVs to get Internet Programming



ROKU has also placed its streaming media player facilities directly into TV sets (similar to a smart TV) instead of having to hook up a ROKU device separately. TV Manufacturers of the “ROKU TV” include - Haier, Hisense, Insignia, Sharp.

Generally cheaper than main brand smart TVs. Supports 4K content, easy to use to get Internet content. Some Roku devices support HDR content.

Pros and Cons of Video over the Internet

Free offerings: YouTube, ad-supported sites

Subscription offerings: e.g., Netflix, SlingTV, CBS All Access

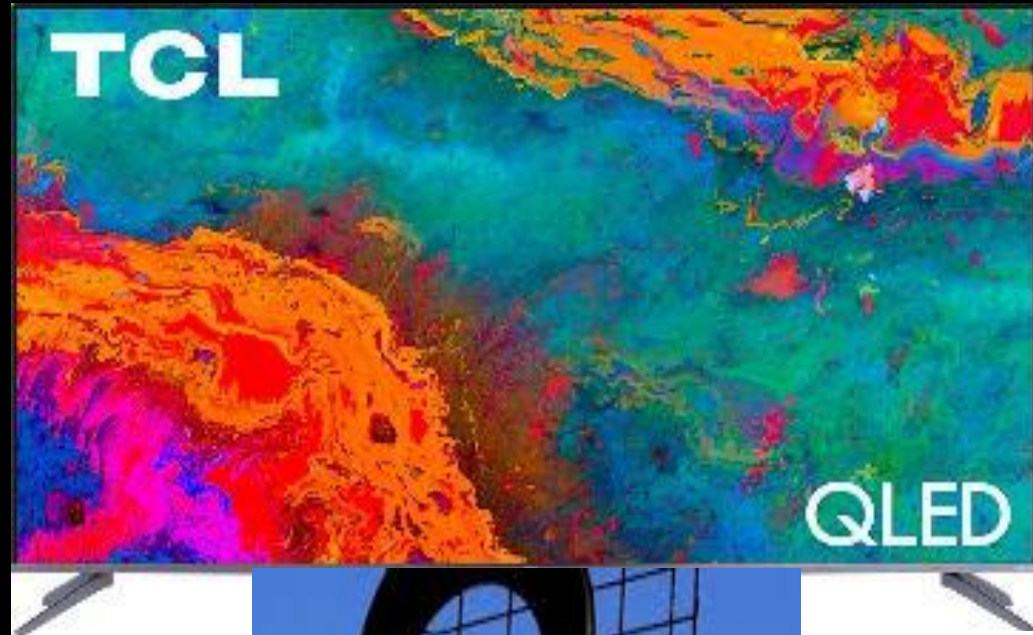
Real Time or “live” programming currently limited but getting better

Requires high-speed Internet service

On demand selection of programming and ability to pause or fast forward very useful

Costs add up if subscribe to several channels

Getting TV OTA then and now



Over the Air TV

June 12, 2009: FCC-mandated switch from analog to digital signals for local broadcast stations such as WETA, NBC, ABC, UNIVISION

With new digital technology, broadcast TV pictures appear crisp, not “snowy”

Channel 7 – WJLA, ABC

Can receive High Definition (HD) TV or Standard definition channels. For example:

7.1 HD

7.2 SD Me-TV

7.3 SD WJLA CMT

TV Set Needed (to get OTA)

- **Digital TV**

- To receive HD signals, need an HDTV (720p or 1080p or 4K)

- **Analog TV** (older type of TV)

- Requires digital-to-analog converter box
- Old TV's (electronics) can be disposed of free of charge 7 days a week (all opening hours) at the County Landfill sites (West Ox Road or Lorton)

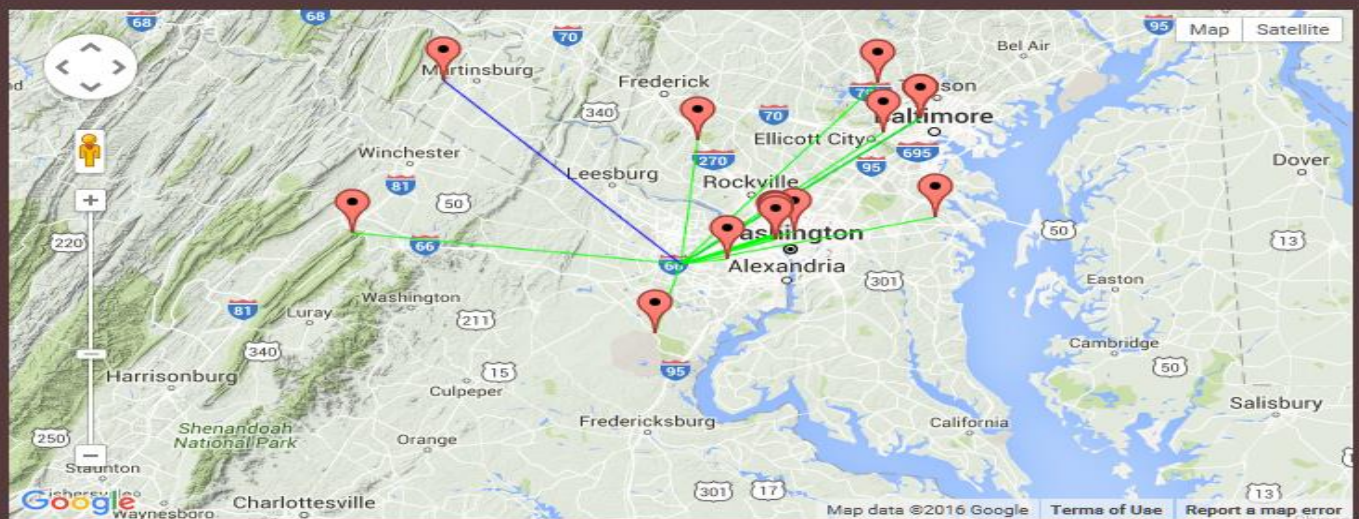
**NOTE - Rooftop
antennas/masts
MUST BE
GROUNDED!!**

FOR OTA TV Antenna Needed The higher the better



antennapoint

transmitter locator



[Advanced Search Options](#)

Search Results: Found 23 transmitters within 60 miles of 22035

[New Search](#)

Sign	Affiliate	RF Channel	Virtual Channel	Band	Power	City	Distance	Heading
WNVC	ETV	24	56.1	UHF	50.0 kW	Fairfax	7.56 mi	80.11°
WRC-TV	NBC	48	4.1	UHF	1000.0 kW	Washington	16.16 mi	68.76°
WFDC-TV	UNIVISION	15	14.1	UHF	900.0 kW	Arlington	16.16 mi	68.76°
WNVT	ETV	30	53.1	UHF	160.0 kW	Goldvein	16.26 mi	194.95°
WDCA	MY NETWORK	35	20.1	UHF	500.0 kW	Washington	16.52 mi	65.06°
WJLA-TV	ABC	7	7.1	VHF	13.62 kW	Washington	16.53 mi	66.58°

ADVERTISEMENT

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The best antennas available. Buy direct and save!

AntennaPoint iPhone App

Put the power of the AntennaPoint Transmitter Locator in the palm of your hand...

Need to scan for channels

- Go to Menu – Change input to “Over the air”
- Scan for available channels. Will only get local broadcast channels – NOT HBO, History Channel, or similar cable-only channels
- Rescan regularly, as channels are added frequently

Emergency Broadband Benefit Plan (EBB)

It is a \$3.2 billion federal initiative to help lower the cost of high-speed internet for eligible households during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program was created by Congress in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

Starting on May 12th, eligible persons can enroll in the FCC's [Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) (EBB) program. The program is temporary and it has been designed to help families and households that are struggling to afford home or wireless internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Persons/households that are eligible for the program will receive a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service from a participating provider and up to \$75 a month for households on qualifying tribal lands. Households can also receive up to a \$100 discount on the purchase of a laptop, desktop, computer, or tablet from a participating provider if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 towards the purchase price. There is a limit of one monthly service discount and one device discount allowed per household.

EBB Program Eligibility Requirements

- In order to qualify for the program, an individual in a household must meet one of the following criteria:
- Has an income that is at or below 135% of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#) (typically earns less than \$14,820) or participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, or [Lifeline](#)
- Approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school year;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Experienced a substantial loss of income due to job loss or furlough since February 29, 2020, and the household had a total income in 2020 at or below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program.

Emergency Broadband Benefit Plan (EBB)

- The EBB is designed to help households in need obtain a discount on monthly Internet access and on a computer or tablet. You can click [here](#) to see the latest EBB program updates from the FCC and [here](#) for the FCC's consumer FAQ.
- **How to Apply.** Beginning on May 12, 2021, eligible households can apply in three ways:
 - 1. Contact your preferred participating broadband provider directly to learn about their application process. [Here](#) is the list of other participating broadband providers in Virginia.
 - 2. Go to [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](https://www.getemergencybroadband.org) to apply online and to find participating providers near you.
 - 3. Call 833-511-0311 for a mail-in application, and return it along with proof of eligibility to: Emergency Broadband Support Center P.O. Box 7081 London, KY 40742
- **Eligibility.** A household is eligible for the EBB if one member of the household:
 - Qualifies for the [Lifeline program](#) or is on Medicaid or receives SNAP benefits;
 - Receives benefits under the free and reduced-price [school lunch program or the school breakfast program](#) (including through the [USDA Community Eligibility Provision](#));
 - Received a [Federal Pell Grant](#) in the current award year;
 - Experienced a substantial loss of income (job loss or furlough) since February 29, 2020 and the household had a total income in 2020 below \$99,000 for single income tax filers and \$198,000 for joint filers; or
 - Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating providers' existing low-income or COVID-19 program. (In Fairfax County, the existing Cable TV providers' low-cost programs can be found here for [Comcast](#), [Cox](#) and [Verizon](#).)
- **Benefits.** Eligible households can receive discounts of up to \$50 a month for broadband service and a one-time discount of up to \$100 on a computer or tablet. The EBB is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per eligible household. These benefits will end once the program funds are exhausted, or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services declares an end to the pandemic, whichever comes first.
- **Background.** . The FCC sought public comments and, on February 25, 2021, unanimously voted to adopt a [Report and Order](#) implementing the program. See the FCC's Fact Sheet [here](#).

Cox Low-Cost Internet Programs

Cox internet COVID-19 assistance (throughout County except for Reston)

Low-income customers: Read about [Connect2Compete](#) or call 855-222-3252.

- Cox Communications will temporarily double the download speeds to 50Mbps from 25Mbps for its Connect2Compete service through the end of the 2020-21 school year. This increase will be effective Friday, Dec. 11, 2020 through June 30, 2021.
- **Program includes \$9.95 per month internet service for qualifying households.**
- Through June 30, 2021, Cox is suspending late fees and extending payment relief offerings for customers in the Connect2Compete that express an inability to pay due to pandemic hardships.
- Details of additional support offerings can be found [here](#).
- For Connect2Compete application, ID is required by Cox. Forms of ID that can be given in lieu of a Social Security number:
 - Group 1-Picture ID
 - State issued driver's license
 - Valid (non-expired) passport
 - State issued ID card
 - Military ID
 - Group 2-Non-Picture ID
 - Current lease agreement in the account holder's name and address
 - Social Security card
 - Current original utility bill in the account holder's name and address
- **Regular Cox customer assistance during COVID-19 pandemic:**
- Internet Starter 10 (\$29.99) for new customers offer expires March 31, 2022?
- Fairfax County does not guarantee information displayed reflects the cable providers' latest rates or offerings. Offers shown may expire or may be subject to change as matters develop

Verizon low-cost provider programs

Verizon internet COVID-19 assistance (throughout the County):

Low-income customers:

New and also existing low-income Fios customers who qualify through Lifeline can enroll in Verizon's "[fios-forward](#)" internet service, which offers internet speeds of 200/200 Mbps starting at \$19.99 per month plus tax, with total savings of up to \$20 per month. Customers must first apply to Lifeline (a Federal program) to qualify for these discounted service costs from Verizon. Click on the Lifeline discount and service details links below to apply to Lifeline or see the attached PDF documents regarding Lifeline and Lifeline application forms.

FCC Lifeline PDF Forms:

- [Lifeline Service Details](#) - English
- [Lifeline Service Application](#) - English
- [Lifeline Service Details](#) - Spanish
- [Lifeline Service Application](#) - Spanish
- [Verizon Lifeline program information and application](#) or dial 1-800-837-4966.
- Starting July 1, 2020, Verizon customers who previously signed up during Verizon's pledge to keep them connected (which expired on June 30, 2020) [may be automatically enrolled in Verizon's Stay Connected repayment program](#) to provide repayment options to stay connected.
- The Federal Communications Commission also extends through June 30, 2021, its waiver of the Lifeline program's requirement that consumers seeking to demonstrate income-based qualification for the Lifeline program must provide at least three consecutive months of documentation to confirm their income.

Comcast low-cost provider programs

Comcast COVID-19 Programs and Low Cost Programs

- **Comcast (Xfinity) internet COVID-19 assistance (Reston only):** Comcast has extended through June 2021, 60 days of free internet service to new eligible Internet Essentials customers. In addition, Comcast will continue to waive, through June 30, 2021, the requirement that customers not have a past due balance with Comcast to qualify for the free offer.
- **Low-income customers:** [Internet Essentials information](#), or dial 1-855-846-8376 English, 1-855-765-6995 Spanish. **Program includes \$9.95 per month internet service for qualifying households.** May offer free internet service for 60 days to new Internet Essentials customers. Effective Mar 1, 2021, Comcast is doubling the program's internet download speed to 50 Mbps and increasing the upstream speed to 5 Mbps for all new and existing customers at no additional cost
- **Regular Comcast customer assistance during COVID-19 pandemic:** This [assistance](#) may include waivers for an inability to pay by the due date, for Comcast subscribers, and free Comcast Wi-Fi spots available to all Reston franchise area residents (including non-Xfinity internet subscribers.)

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Questions

- **Communications Policy and Regulation Division** (assists with cable-related problems and cable safety and construction issues)

Allan Hide

- Call: 703-324-5902 or 324-4980 or 571-459-8974
- email: allan.hide@fairfaxcounty.gov
douglas.Povich@fairfaxcounty.gov
- Web: www.FairfaxCounty.gov/cable/

- **Consumer Affairs Branch** - (incl. cable billing and all complaints against a business in the County)

- Call for advice: 703-222-8435
- File complaints: www.FairfaxCounty.gov/consumer/complaints.htm