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[ccagw.org](http://ccagw.org)

October 1, 2021

Chairman Joe Skinner  
Commissioner Scott MacFarlane  
Commissioner Zach Brown  
311 W. Main Street, Room 306  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Chairman Skinner and Commissioners MacFarlane and Brown,

On behalf of the 769 members and supporters of the Council for Citizens Against Government Waste (CCAGW) in Gallatin County and our 9,628 members and supporters in Montana, I strongly urge you to delay the Wednesday, October 5, 2021, vote on issuing a \$65 million Industrial Development Revenue Bond to Bozeman Fiber, Inc. for the acquisition, construction, equipping, and installation of a fiber optic network in Bozeman until greater transparency and accountability is provided about the operations of the company and its [relationship](#) with UTOPIA Net, as well as how private sector broadband providers can achieve the same objectives to reach unserved and underserved areas of the city and country.

Although the people of Gallatin County will benefit from an expansion of broadband access, the potential costs of moving forward with the bond for Bozeman Fiber, Inc., like other government owned or subsidized networks, outweigh the benefits to consumers and taxpayers. A better approach to increasing broadband access would be through the removal or easement of regulatory barriers to deployment like franchise access fees, pole attachment requirements, right-of-way easements, and an expedited application process for incoming private sector broadband infrastructure development. As noted in the [attached](#) report, “The Folly of Government Owned Networks,” government owned networks (GONs) like Bozeman Fiber, Inc. do more harm than good. As the report observes, “GON projects have proven to be costly, unsustainable, and anti-competitive.” Further, these projects “divert taxpayer resources from higher priorities and fail to solve connectivity issues.”

Of particular concern to CCAGW is the potential for taxpayer resources or other government supported bonds issued by Gallatin County to be used to overbuild a dark fiber network in areas that already have broadband deployment, rather than ensuring those in the community without internet access can be connected. BroadbandNow.com lists 14 residential internet service [providers](#) in Bozeman, the top six most popular of which are CenturyLink, with 97 percent availability of DSL and fiber with download speeds of up to 80 Mbps; Spectrum, with 82.1 percent availability of cable with download speeds up to 1,000 Mbps (1 Gbps); Viasat, with 100 percent availability of satellite service with download speeds up to 25 Mbps; HughesNet, with 100 percent availability of satellite internet service with download speeds up to 25 Mbps; Montana Internet Corporation, with 99.9 percent availability of DSL with download speeds up to 7 Mbps; and Wisp West, with 99.7 percent availability of fixed wireless with download speeds

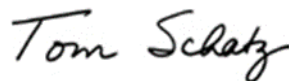
up to 25 Mbps. Other providers include Global Net; Montana Opticom; Little Apple Technologies; and Blackfoot Communications. Broadband.com notes that only 700, or 1.3 percent of consumers in Bozeman, have access to one or fewer wired internet providers available to their address.

The widespread and varied availability of internet access shows that broadband access is not a one size fits all proposition and disproves the claim by Bozeman Fiber that fiber is the only and best technology to close the digital divide. The best approach to broadband deployment is to be vendor and technology neutral, where needs are met based on the best technology solution for the customer, which may include cable, DLS, fiber, fixed wireless, mobile broadband, satellite, or TV white space using a fixed wireless connection. Rather than throw all its eggs into the same fiber basket, which increases risk and removes options, Gallatin County should ensure that its residents have the option to choose whatever system works best for them.

Bozeman Fiber was established in 2015 as a nonprofit entity by Gallatin County, the City of Bozeman, and Bozeman Public Schools with a mission to provide a gigabit fiber network for government offices, libraries, schools, and businesses. To date, Bozeman Fiber has deployed 25 miles of fiber in Bozeman. Its intent to deploy broadband in the unserved rural areas of the county has been unclear, and the bond request appears to be geared toward expanding its network within its existing boundaries before ensuring that unserved areas of the community are connected. Before the Gallatin County Commission votes to issue a bond supporting Bozeman Fiber, its members must ensure that the details of the plan to expand fiber are made public, as well as provide an accounting of how taxpayer resources will be spent in the process.

As representatives of the people of Gallatin County, county commissioners are obligated to provide their constituents with a clear understanding of how Bozeman Fiber, Inc. is better and more cost-effective than private sector broadband providers to provide broadband access to unserved and underserved county residents before approving the \$65 million bond. We look forward to seeing the results of your review and analysis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Schatz". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.