

**REMARKS OF GIGI B. SOHN,  
COUNSELOR TO FCC CHAIRMAN WHEELER  
REMARKS AT WESTMINSTER'S FIBER LAUNCH PARTY  
WESTMINSTER, MD  
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Good afternoon! Thank you to Council President Wack for inviting me to speak today. It's great to be here in Westminster, and I'm not just saying that because you're close to the Pennsylvania border and I can easily score some illegal fireworks for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July while I'm up here. It's truly a pleasure for me to be here in Westminster on this auspicious occasion – the lighting of the city's fiber network. My boss Chairman Tom Wheeler sends his hearty congratulations.

What is happening today is a great example of local communities and their leaders taking control of their broadband future. Dr. Wack and other local leaders recognized the increasingly undeniable fact that true high-speed broadband has become a necessity in our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and democracy. You concluded that existing broadband offerings were not meeting Westminster's needs, and that the only solution was to become directly involved in plans for broadband deployment.

And what wonderful plans they are. The city has chosen to engage in a private-public partnership with Ting, which will be providing Westminster with what they call "crazy fast fiber Internet." It's hard to believe that what you have built is the first community constructed fiber network in the Mid-Atlantic region. What has been developed and built here in Westminster can become a model for other cities in Maryland and across the nation. That is incredibly exciting.

There are so many things that have impressed me about what you have done here, and I wanted to take a few minutes to recognize just a few of them.

First, I admire how strategic your Westminster and Carroll County leaders were in taking the time and engaging in the due diligence necessary to ensure that your vision actually became a reality. And I appreciate that every step of the way, the process has been open, transparent and inclusive.

I know that this fiber network didn't just pop up overnight. From what I understand, this all started with Dr. Wack's efforts to get Carroll County to expand its middle mile network over ten years ago!

The success of this expansion laid the foundation for Westminster's own exploration into deploying a citywide network, starting with two pilot projects two summers ago – one residential pilot at the Carroll Lutheran Village and one business pilot at the Westminster Technology Park.

Second, I applaud the innovative public private partnership you have built with Ting. This partnership promotes a type of teamwork not often found in the marketplace. Instead of being adversaries, you are partners, committed to delivering the best broadband to the citizens of Westminster. Even better, the partnership reduces the financial risk to the city and citizens of Westminster because the burdens and benefits of the network are shared by the partners. As a result, everyone has the incentive to work as hard as possible to ensure that the network succeeds.

Last, but not least, the open access model that Westminster has with Ting is an approach that I believe will reap benefits to the citizens of Westminster for years to come.

For those of you who are unfamiliar, the open access model will provide Ting with temporary exclusivity in delivering services to Westminster for either two years or when a minimum number of subscribers are activated, whichever occurs first.

At that point, the City will have the ability to open up the network to allow other broadband access providers to enter the market. The resulting competition will mean lower prices and better services for consumers.

There will be other benefits stemming from your community's investment in a fiber network. I'd like to highlight a few:

First, as I said before, Westminster will be getting "crazy fast fiber internet."

As I understand it, about 10,000 homes and businesses in the community will be able to receive up to a 1 Gbps internet connection.

To give you some perspective on just how fast this really is, according to Akamai the average US broadband connection is 12 Mbps download. That's fine if you live alone, and all you're doing online is minimal browsing each night while streaming a movie on Netflix.

Gigabit speed means faster video streaming, faster photo uploading, faster everything for multiple devices in homes and businesses. More importantly, it means, among other things, a greater ability for workers to telecommute; for students young and old to take college courses online; for kids to do their homework; for doctors to check on patients; and for citizens to interact with their state, local and federal governments.

Second, Westminster will become a global leader in Gigabit broadband.

Westminster is at the cutting edge not just of community broadband, but of broadband Internet access worldwide.

Westminster will join an elite group of US cities, including Chattanooga, Kansas City and Austin, and cities around the world like Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo that will be delivering up to 1 Gbps Internet connections to its residents and businesses.

Third, Westminster's gigabit network will promote economic growth and the well-being of its citizens.

We have seen time and again that community broadband networks bring with them many benefits that go far beyond mere speed. For example, Chattanooga Tennessee used to be famous as "America's Dirtiest City." Chattanooga's Electric Power Board or "EPB" became the first in the nation to offer gigabit service to all of its customers. Since then Chattanooga has seen companies like Amazon and Volkswagen invest in new facilities, and the city has started its own incubator. It is now known as the "Gigabit City" and it is attracting entrepreneurs and young workers.

This kind of investment started in Westminster even before the first customer was served. Last year, Carlisle Etcetera, a women's fashion clothing company, relocated from New York City to Westminster. Carlisle moved its distribution center down and is moving some portion of their IT operations here to take advantage of Westminster's fiber network. And I understand that the city is considering building an incubator. I wouldn't be surprised to see the same influx of people and resources once your network gets up and running. As the mysterious voice said to Kevin Costner in the movie "Field of Dreams", "If you build it, they will come."

Friends, with your investment in fiber infrastructure, the possibilities and prospects for this community moving forward are endless. You have not only made an investment in a network, but an investment in Westminster's future.

Please be assured that the FCC is an ally to Westminster and all communities looking to offer their citizens more competitive choices for true high-speed Internet. We are committed to cutting through bureaucratic red tape to accelerate and lower the costs of broadband deployment. For example, our recent Open Internet Order eased access to utility poles and other conduits necessary to broadband deployment. We also approved petitions from the leaders of Chattanooga, Tennessee and Wilson, North Carolina to pre-empt the restrictive state laws hampering investment and deployment in their areas.

We believe local elected officials should have the right to make their own decisions about their broadband future. Today, the leaders of Westminster remind us why that freedom is so important. I want to congratulate you again for being a leader in community broadband and a model for other communities to emulate. Chairman Wheeler and I applaud your ambition and look forward to working with you to deliver the benefits of broadband to your community.

Thank you.