

August 12, 2026

To: Howland Township Board of Trustees

From: Admin. J. Pantalone

Re: Fiber Optic Initiative

During the July 8 Trustee meeting, the Board approved a resolution authorizing correspondence to elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels, as well as to other parties with a public interest in the fiber-optic initiative. Those letters requested support at all levels to address installation practices and improve oversight throughout Trumbull County.

I am pleased to report that these efforts have helped initiate a series of meetings that are showing promising progress.

On July 21, Representative Nick Santucci coordinated a meeting with Roger Lipscomb, State Director of Ohio 811, held at the Commissioners' hearing room. The meeting provided an overview of the obligations and responsibilities at each level regarding utility marking and explained how the Ohio 811 system works.

Mr. Lipscomb also provided information about an app that allows residents to view active utility-marking tickets and receive status updates. This information was subsequently shared through the Howland Connect app and social media to help residents better understand the process and determine who is working within their front right-of-way.

While this was not the comprehensive solution we were seeking, it does provide residents with significantly better information about **“who is digging in their right-of-way and what work is being performed.”**

We also learned during this meeting that Representative Roy Klopfenstein, District 82, is introducing **House Bill 979**, legislation intended to improve and clarify the rules governing broadband providers' use of public rights-of-way and ultimately provide greater protection for Ohio residents.

Representative Santucci encouraged us to compile a list of the issues we have experienced so that those concerns can be considered in the legislation. Rather than having multiple House Bills introduced across the state addressing similar concerns, the Ohio House Speaker has encouraged House leadership to support Representative Klopfenstein and HB 979 as the primary legislative effort.

Continued County-Level Efforts

The Trumbull County Commissioners have continued moving this initiative forward. With assistance from Trumbull County Deputy Planning Director Nic Coggins, a second meeting was held yesterday, August 11, with representatives from the fiber companies.

The meeting focused on several key areas:

- Improving communication between fiber companies, communities, and residents
- Ensuring safe practices are followed in the field
- Ensuring English-speaking staff are available when needed
- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact information
- Improving accountability and oversight of contractors and subcontractors
- Reducing the time required to restore yards, hardscapes, and rights-of-way after construction

Each fiber provider gave an overview of its operations in Trumbull County and discussed steps being taken to address previous shortcomings. Several companies reported that they have terminated subcontractors and increased supervisory presence in the field to ensure safety rules and regulations are being followed.

Those in attendance emphasized the need for safer construction practices and increased use of available industry equipment to protect residents and existing utilities.

Our County Engineer, David DeChristofaro, who attended the meeting, identified specific instances where contractors had provided names that were not associated with the companies they were working for when applying for excavation permits. As the Engineer noted, this creates a significant accountability problem because it makes it difficult to track who is working, where they are working, and which company is responsible.

The County Engineer requested that current contractor and company contact information be provided regularly to the County and local communities and kept up to date.

Restoration and Customer Service

There was also considerable discussion about improving the speed and process for restoring yards, hardscape, and rights-of-way to their standard condition following construction.

These companies depend on our residents to purchase their services. With that comes an expectation of good customer service, responsible construction practices, and timely restoration.

Our residents notice both the companies that do the job well and those that do not. Poor construction practices and poor restoration ultimately reflect on the companies involved and can affect their reputation within our communities.

Townships that do not currently have a permitting process were encouraged to review the Ohio Revised Code and consider adopting an appropriate permitting process.

Progress in Howland Township

As for Howland Township, we will continue to put pressure on these companies in each of these areas and advocate for safer practices, better communication, greater accountability, and timely restoration.

I am encouraged by what I have seen in the Township over the past several weeks since this initiative was launched. We are seeing increased use of hand digging, or "potholing," to verify the location of existing utilities in conjunction with boring operations. This is an important safety practice that significantly reduces the likelihood of striking an existing utility.

Just this morning, I received a phone call from a resident who felt it was important to recognize these efforts. He reported several improvements in his neighborhood, including properly marked trucks, an on-site supervisor, and noticeably improved cleanup following the work.

These may seem like small improvements, but they are meaningful indicators that the message is getting through.

We recognize that there is still work to be done. However, the increased communication, county-level coordination, legislative attention, and improvements we are beginning to see in the field are encouraging.

Howland Township will continue to advocate for our residents and work with the County, state officials, and fiber providers to ensure that these improvements continue.

Attached is a response from Representative Nick Santucci regarding our July 8 correspondence and request for assistance.

Respectfully,

James T. Pantalone, OFE
Administrator