



## Installation expensive

But not Stoughton, where Borling says about 40 homes in her neighborhood are within a half-mile of broadband access from Charter Communications and AT&T - yet those companies won't extend the service.

"We have contacted every possible provider," Borling said.

Charter serves more than 500 communities in the state, including Stoughton, but says it's sometimes too expensive to bring broadband to certain neighborhoods.

The company says it might have overlooked Borling's neighborhood when it laid out broadband service in Stoughton.

But it also might have skipped the area because the cost of installing fiber-optic cable under the Yahara River was too high.

Normally it costs about \$30,000 per mile to extend service, according to Charter.

It could cost more than \$1 million to install cable under a river, said Tim Vowell, Charter's vice president of government relations.

AT&T doesn't offer U-verse broadband service in Borling's neighborhood, although it has U-verse coverage in other parts of the city and offers wireless broadband.

U-verse is delivered into homes over the same copper wires that carry AT&T's telephone service.

Sometimes it's available on one side of the street but not the other, said AT&T spokesman Jim Greer.

Other communities, not on a river, have been frustrated in their efforts to get broadband.

There are large coverage gaps in rural areas where broadband providers say it's not profitable to extend service, according to the UW Extension.

## An economic tool

UW Extension is using stimulus money to bring broadband to libraries and other community facilities in northern counties. But even where broadband is available, residents often get mediocre speeds, said Andy Larsen, a UW Extension community and economic development manager.

For example, Chattanooga, Tenn., is building a broadband system with speeds up to 1 gigabit per second, much faster than speeds of 3 megabits or less often found in Wisconsin.

The higher speeds are especially important to businesses that stream large amounts of data. Thus, broadband becomes an economic development tool.

Three Lakes, in Oneida County, has ramped up its broadband service without using stimulus money.

Officials in the town of 2,254 courted five broadband providers, helping them round up customers through a technology trade fair.

At the fair, several hundred people lined up for service - much to the surprise of broadband providers who didn't have high expectations, said Town Chairman Don Sidlowski.

Three Lakes now has high-speed Internet available to nearly 90% of its residents, including about 8,000 people who are only in the area for summer vacations. Three years ago, only 31% of the residents had access to one or two Internet providers, according to town officials.

People have moved to Three Lakes because now they can work from home or set up a business, according to Sidlowski, who runs a marketing business from his home.

"We decided the best strategy to boost our economy was to use broadband to turn home offices into global operations," he said.

The town's population includes many business executives with summer homes, or who come to Three Lakes in the winter for snowmobiling and skiing.

That helped recruit broadband customers, Sidlowski said, since wealthy people want to be connected to the Web no matter where they are.

"We also went after broadband providers who understood the North Woods mentality," he said. "They understood that folks in this area want seasonal subscriptions."

Three Lakes was one of 14 communities nationwide chosen by Verizon Wireless for a broadband project that greatly increased access speeds. The town also offered broadband providers access to public property for wireless towers, and a loan fund was established to encourage infrastructure.

It took a combination of technologies to boost the service in Three Lakes.

That's going to be the case in many communities, and sparsely populated rural areas, where it's too expensive to install miles of fiber-optic cable for a limited number of customers.

"We just did all of this with good old-fashioned business savvy and elbow grease," Sidlowski said.