

California is facing a digital crisis, with far too many residents left without adequate and affordable broadband service. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the lack of reliable and affordable internet service to the forefront due to the necessity of distance learning and remote working, tele-healthcare and remote access to employment, economic and human services. The Salinas Valley is no exception. There are numerous areas that prior to the pandemic were uncovered or inadequately covered. It would be beneficial for cities and the County to work together and share costs to plan and implement the development of community broadband and/or high-speed internet.

Project Description:

In response to the Board referral, ITD met with Counsel and CAO discussed and reviewed the JPA Agreement. In addition, ITD conducted a series of meetings and discussions:

1. ITD met with Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), regarding broadband funding opportunities, and benefits of forming a regional JPA;
2. ITD met with Utopia Fiber, regarding their open-access network business model;
3. ITD met with Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California (CENIC) and discussed their existing fiber alongside Highway 101 and the state Middle-Mile initiative.

ITD supports the JPA initiative which would enable cities and the County to work together with a collective vision and cost sharing. ITD believes that the open-access network approach that leverages federal and state funds could lower subscriber cost and contribute to the County's already-existing broadband initiative. ITD recommends that as part of the JPA agreement, all parties to the potential JPA agreement should build the network expeditiously and leverage existing infrastructure where feasible, to help the unserved and underserved as ITD has already been tasked with and is currently working on via a broadband RFP. ITD recommends that specific projects and vendor names should be removed from the proposed JPA draft and keep the agreement general.

Detailed discussion regarding this topic is covered by the attached Board presentation.

Estimated Project Cost:

County's initial contribution will be \$10,000. Additional County staffing cost would likely be needed. ITD will return to the Board with estimated additional costs if there are any.

Staffing Level Estimate:

Additional staffing may be needed. ITD will return to Board with a staffing request if there is any.

Departmental Challenges:

The community broadband challenge is about coming up with a sustainable and executable public and private partnership model that will benefit Monterey County residents for the long term, while producing quick and measurable outcomes. As such, ITD will continue working on the approved community broadband projects and deliver community broadband services to County constituents in accordance the Board's prior direction to do so and the effort currently underway with the broadband RFP.

Proposed Response Date:

ITD will provide Board with updates as needed.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

The pandemic has underscored the critical utility of broadband infrastructure. From the homework gap and workforce adaptation to essential healthcare services and e-commerce, broadband is now the keystone to our nation's response to the global pandemic and imperative to building resilient and future-ready communities. The lack of reliable broadband is a major economic barrier and a leading driver of socioeconomic inequality. County's goal is to ensure that every resident in Monterey County, regardless of their circumstances, could access broadband. The ability to do so will pay dividends far beyond the current crisis we find ourselves in. With unprecedented federal and state funding that will soon be allocated to address the digital divide and expand broadband access throughout California, including federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, a record state budget allocation this year, there is an immediate need for local governments, including the Board of Supervisors, cities, school districts, special districts, universities and other community partners and institutions, to create a governance structure to better facilitate regional strategy, collaboration and partnerships on expanding broadband access and closing the digital divide throughout Monterey County.

X Economic Development

Administration

X Health & Human Services

X Infrastructure

Public Safety

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Attachments:

Board Presentation

Board Referral No. #2022.09