



County of Monterey

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Board Report

File #: A 21-400, **Version:** 1

Consider the report outlined below, in response to Board Referral No. 2020.25 to support collaborative efforts to address the digital divide in partnership with local school districts, cities, the County of Monterey, and community partners to address the digital divide for our local students and all other county residents, and to advocate for solutions at the state and federal level.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Receive the report outlined below in response to Board Referral No. 2020.25.
- b. Provide directions on the next steps regarding this referral based on Monterey County IT department (ITD)'s recommendations:
 - 1) Request Board to consider this referral being completed.
 - 2) ITD will report to Board quarterly on the community broadband project progress through its presentation on Board referral #2021.08 on broadband JPA.
 - 3) Provide further direction, as appropriate.

SUMMARY:

ITD received Board referral #2020.25 on Sept. 6, 2020 to support collaborative efforts to address the digital divide in partnership with local school districts, cities, the County of Monterey, and community partners to address the digital divide for our local students and all other county residents, and to advocate for solutions at the state and federal level. Specifically, ITD was asked to:

1. Support collaborative efforts to address the digital divide in partnership with local schools, cities, and community partners.
2. Advocate with FCC to regulate broadband access as a utility.
3. Request and sponsor legislation for a universal broadband bond to be placed on the 2022 election ballot.
4. Conduct a county-wide community survey on digital divide and affordable internet service.

This report summarizes ITD's effort in response to the Board referral.

ANALYSIS:

Background:

Monterey County has a serious digital divide problem and a recent photo of two little girls outside a fast-food restaurant in East Salinas has brought national attention to this crisis. According to the Monterey County Office of Education, at least 10,500 students do not have access to the internet and our children are being adversely impacted every day.

This referral requests the support of the Board of Supervisors and ITD for local collaborative efforts to address this issue. On September 4, 2020, a first joint meeting was held with school district superintendents, school board members, Salinas council members and staff, Supervisors Lopez and Alejo and County staff, PUC Commissioner Martha Guzman, and community partners. The goal was to collaborate on short- and long-term strategies to bring universal broadband to all Salinas residents and to also address other parts of Monterey

County. The goal was also to consider models of sharing costs among the various local governments to achieve the goals.

ITD received Board referral #2020.25 on Sept. 6, 2020 to support collaborative efforts to address the digital divide in partnership with local school districts, cities, the County of Monterey, and community partners to address the digital divide for our local students and all other county residents, and to advocate for solutions at the state and federal level.

Project Description:

In response to the referral, ITD worked with Central Coast Broadband Consortium, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, and proposed community broadband projects to Board on June 2, 2021. Subsequently, Board approved \$1.9 million in ARPA funds for FY 21-22. ITD worked with County Counsel to have identified the appropriate mechanism to distribute funds equitably to qualified partners. A Request for Proposal will soon be released.

ITD also worked diligently on the Board referral #2021.08 on regional broadband JPA. The discussion will be covered in a separate report and presentation.

ITD is engaged in a project to provide public Wi-Fi to County residents around 24 County sites. The project will benefit County residents within 328 feet beyond building perimeters at the County sites. Most Library sites already have external public Wi-Fi. Public safety sites will be excluded. Expected completion date will be around September 2021.

ITD participated in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB) initiated by Federal Communications Commission. As such, ITD held a local media briefing on April 21, 2021 and provided a Board presentation on April 27, 2021. In addition, a “How to” guide has been published on County web site.

ITD has been actively engaged and working collaboratively with County Public Works department on the adoption of a “Dig Once” policy, as a County ordinance or a resolution. This will reduce the cost of building out internet access by private providers. Many municipal governments are already doing it, including South San Francisco and City of Salinas. Public Works is working on deciding on the appropriate adoption of the policy in the format of an ordinance versus a resolution. ITD will share with Public Works regarding other cities’ operation practices.

ITD participated in the Broadband strategic plan initiative led by Rural County Representative of California (RCRC) and submitted grant application letter of support in May 2021. ITD also provided a signed MOU from the County of Monterey for the participation of the Broadband Strategic Plan development.

ITD has been working closely with internet service providers and received broadband development updates from providers. An inquiry was sent to Charter, AT&T and Comcast on April 2, 2021. Responses were received from Charter Communications and AT&T. Charter Communications completed network upgrades for Laguna Seca area in November 2020 and expect to complete Carmel Highland upgrade in July 2021. AT&T held a meeting with ITD on June 24, 2021 and shared with ITD of its broadband development progress. Fiber is now available in some Big Sur area including Post Ranch.

In November 2019, ITD provided public comments with letter of support to California Broadband Council in support of State Broadband Action Plan and advocated with FCC to regulate broadband access as a utility. ITD is closely tracking legislation and State budget development on broadband. There is significant development on State budget related to broadband. The currently proposed State budget includes a \$6 billion plan for broadband infrastructure and improved access to broadband over a multi-year period. The plan includes \$3.75 billion for a statewide open-access middle-mile network, \$250 million for a loan-loss reserve to leverage additional investment, and \$2 billion for last-mile projects.

Of the \$6 billion, \$4.3 billion comes from the American Rescue Plan Act and \$1.7 billion is General Fund. The entire middle-mile appropriation is in the budget year, while the other pieces are contingent on further

legislation, the details of which will continue to be negotiated between the Legislature and the Governor. In addition to this infrastructure package, the budget also provides \$6 million for public libraries for the Broadband Connectivity initiative, as well as \$35 million, available until June 30, 2025, for local projects to expand broadband access for isolated and under-served communities through a collaborative partnership of local education agencies, regional and local libraries, and telehealth providers.

Finally, CCBC and MBEP forwarded Community Broadband Survey developed by Governor's Office to members agencies and community partners with survey results pending.

ITD would like to receive Board's directions on the next steps regarding this referral:

1. Request Board to consider this referral being completed.
2. Report to Board quarterly on the community broadband project progress through its presentation on Board referral #2021.08 on broadband JPA.
3. Provide further direction, as appropriate.

Estimated Project Cost:

\$4.2 million over the next three years to complete the community broadband projects. Board approved \$1.9 million in FY21-22.

Staffing Level Estimate:

No additional staff is needed.

Departmental Challenges:

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 run, 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.

Proposed Response Date:

ITD will report to Board quarterly on the community broadband project progress through its presentation on Board referral #2021.08 regarding broadband JPA.

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.

X Economic Development

__ Administration

X Health & Human Services

X Infrastructure

__ Public Safety

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Approved by:

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Attachments:

Board Referral No. 2020.25

Board Presentation