



CITY OF MADISON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Summary of Digital Inclusion Efforts

Background

In 2017 to 2018, the City of Madison piloted a program with five neighborhoods (chosen through the NRTs) to get reduced cost internet service through a small, local commercial internet service provider. Out of the five neighborhoods, 19 residents signed up for the pilot program service since. We also saw commercial providers began to offer low-cost deals to residents as to compete against the City's vendor. It was hard to compete with commercial ISPs who were able to heavily market and offer much better packages and rates to residents in the five neighborhoods.

On a parallel track, the City hired CTC Technology and Energy Consulting Firm to research and develop a Fiber-to-the-Premises implementation to create a public internet utility. The final cost would have been about \$173 million. To cover the \$150 million in construction expenses and additional startup capital necessary in the initial years of the network, the City will need to pursue two separate 20-year general obligation (GO) bonds, totaling \$173.2 million, or some other revenue funding strategy. The implementation plan was accepted by the Common Council in October of 2018. The plan was placed on file. The final recommendation from the Digital Technology Committee was as follows: "The Citywide Broadband Subcommittee (CBS) recommends the Digital Technology Committee (DTC) accept the Fiber-to-the-Premises (FTTP) Implementation Plan submitted by CTC Technology and Energy, and further recommends the FTTP Implementation Plan not be pursued at this time for financial reasons. Based on the financial projections in the report, the City's obligations would be too high to justify proceeding. Previous expectations of potential federal support are no longer tenable, as any remaining state or federal funding for broadband projects is now targeted to rural areas. It is further moved and seconded that the Digital Technology Committee consider exploring smaller, more targeted approaches as described in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the FTTP."

Limitations:

Public entities, such as the City of Madison, have limitations based on Wisconsin Statutes regarding the ability for the City to provide internet services, including Wi-Fi to residents, community centers or any non-profits which really limits are ability to support residents in bridging the digital divide. We are also limited by the lack of grant funding that is offered to large municipalities. All Federal and State funding is currently going to rural communities. Hopefully we will see more grant funding opportunities in the new Federal administration and will pursue opportunities when made available.

The City of Madison is a member of the Metropolitan Unified Fiber Network (MUFN). MUFN is a fiber transport network but is not internet service provider. There are two commercial MUFN members who have separate contracts with the City of Madison and they are ISP providers. In their contracts, the commercial ISPs are required to either provide internet services to 18 identified/supported Community Development neighborhood, non-profits or community centers or build laterals to certain City facilities (water towers and libraries). The contracts are very specific about what services the commercial partners will provide and Wi-Fi and hooking up new entities is not in their contracts so this again limits what we can connect.

Current activities:

IT is currently collaborating with CDA Housing and other partners, such as, MMSD, MPL and DaneNet on a multi-prong approach (Connectivity, Devices, Digital Literacy) to try to address various components of the digital divide in Madison.

One of the projects to address digital inclusion is in CDA Housing. A feasibility study has established a baseline understanding of the needs of CDA residents. Funding for the study was in the 2019 IT Capital budget.

In another project, CDA Housing and the IT have partnered together on the Madison ConnectHome initiative, an initiative to narrow the digital divide for HUD assisted households in the City of Madison. The initiative was launched in 2020 with the inaugural Madison Digital Inclusion Summit. While the initiative timeline has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continuing to move forward in 2021.

Key activities as part of the project are:

- Develop tracking mechanism to track connection improvements.
- Upgrade current devices owned by CDA in computer labs at CDA properties.
- Connect CDA residents to refurbished/low cost devices.
- Determine digital literacy class locations with internet access at CDA properties.
- Develop after school, workforce training, and senior training programs.
- Create a Digital Ambassador Program.
- Connect with Corporation for National Community Services (CNCS) offices for AmeriCorps VISTA opportunity.
- Develop and implement a communications strategy.
- Provide opportunities for access to the internet in the home and at computer labs

Other Activities:

- IT has \$10,000 in our Operating Budget for Digital Inclusion. We will be partnering with DaneNet and Madison Public Libraries to offer Digital Literacy classes and provide low-cost devices.
- We will also continue our ConnectHome work with CDA and Madison Public Library (MPL).
- Create a detailed City of Madison communications plan to promote the [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#)
- Continue to explore digital access options with MMSD and MPL.
- Meet with commercial partners to explore new options for digital access
- Create Digital Inclusion Strategic Priorities