



Legislation Text

File #: 22-0412, **Version:** 1

Chief Administrative Office and Planning and Building Department, Economic Development Division, recommending the Board receive and file an update from the County's Broadband Consultant, Neo Connect, on Broadband planning efforts for an Economic Development Administration Grant in collaboration with the City of South Lake Tahoe and the Tahoe Prosperity Center specific to designing a broadband project in Tahoe Basin.

FUNDING: Transient Occupancy Tax.

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

On September 1, 2015 (File No. 15-1020, Item No. 27), following a presentation on the state of Broadband infrastructure in the County, the Board established a Broadband Technical Advisory Committee (Committee) to work on broadband issues and appointed two (2) Board members to serve on that Committee.

On January 12, 2016 (File No. 16-0006, V1, Item No. 5), the Board adopted Resolution 013-2016, which approved the submittal of an application for an (EDA Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program Grant to complete a Broadband feasibility study.

On September 27, 2016 (File No. 16-0006, V2, Item No. 25), the Board authorized acceptance of a \$75,000 grant award from the EDA Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program to conduct a Broadband feasibility study in the County and committed \$75,000 for the 50% County match required by the grant. The previously approved Resolution 013-2016 states that improved Broadband service fits strongly within the County's Economic Development Strategic Plan and that building Broadband capacity in the County is "a way to create and retain jobs, educate and retain students, and position the County in the 21st-century economy."

A technical advisory group was also formed to assist with technical expertise in the area of Broadband policy and infrastructure. This group included members from non-profit organizations with special interests in Broadband technology and stakeholder community members.

On January 3, 2017, the Chief Administrative Office, Procurement and Contracts Division, issued Request for Proposals (RFP) 17-918-031 for a Broadband Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study. Following the closure of this RFP, a team consisting of one (1) Board Supervisor, two (2) County staff, and three (3) community members evaluated the RFP responses and a qualified proposer was identified. On April 25, 2017 (File No. 17-0442, Item No. 5), the Board approved the award of RFP 17-918-031 to NEO Fiber, Inc., doing business as Neo Connect, a Colorado-based consulting firm specializing in broadband planning and analysis, authorized the Chief Administrative Officer to negotiate an agreement with Neo Connect, and also authorized the Purchasing Agent to execute that agreement. On September 20, 2017, the Purchasing Agent executed Agreement 248 with Neo Connect, with a not-to-exceed amount of \$126,000 and a term of one (1) year.

On January 23, 2018 (File No. 18-0077, Item No. 37), the Board received a presentation from Neo

Connect regarding a summary of their efforts so far, including the current broadband environment and infrastructure in the County, and results of surveys and community engagement. Neo Connect's presentation also included examples of policies and ordinances that facilitate broadband deployment, such as "dig once" or "shadow conduit" policies.

On June 30, 2020 (File No. 20-0835, Item No. 37), at the request of the Committee, the Board provided direction to staff to work with Neo Connect to apply for a grant from the EDA. This specific EDA grant is for services related to the design, engineering, and construction of Broadband for priority areas within the County, using designated TOT funds of \$450,000 as the 10% County match. This grant allows for the funding of a project up to \$4.5 million. Staff has completed all requirements of the submission and is in the final steps of receiving a formal grant offer. The project areas are in Garden Valley, Georgetown, and Cool.

On August 24, 2021 (File No. 21-1319, Item No. 21), at the request of the Committee, the Board received a presentation and report from Neo Connect regarding broadband planning efforts and potential funding available through American Rescue Plan Act funds. As part of this item, the Board directed the Chief Administrative Officer to continue conversations with the City of South Lake Tahoe (City) to pursue the City's portion of the matching funds or additional funding for South Lake Tahoe fiber project. The Board also directed staff to pursue option 2b "in the Summary of Recommendations" (Attachment B- Slide 14) to use TOT funds for the County's required match of \$1,680,000. The Board also approved the use of \$5,000-\$10,000 in TOT funds for a speed test campaign as well as an additional \$50,000 in TOT funds for staff to start environmental and cultural work for the South Lake Tahoe fiber project.

Since the last broadband update to the Board, County staff has been working to execute an agreement with a consultant to completed a speed test campaign and anticipate beginning outreach efforts in the spring of 2022. Staff has also met with the Chief Administrative Officer and the City Manager of South Lake Tahoe and agreed that both jurisdictions will apply for the EDA grant, and that the percentage of parcels served in each jurisdiction will be reflected in the percentage of matching dollars each jurisdiction allocates towards the grant opportunity. Based on this methodology, the County's portion of matching funds is \$72,000, and the City's portion of matching funds is \$1,128,000.

ALTERNATIVES

The Board may choose to not to approve the use of ARPA or TOT funds as matching funds for the County's portion of the EDA grant match requirement. This would require that staff explore other options to fund the County's match requirement, which may result in delays in completing the EDA grant application process.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

See Discussion/Background above.

OTHER DEPARTMENT/ AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Chief Administrative Office

CAO RECOMMENDATION/COMMENTS

Approve as recommended.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no change to Net County Cost associated with this item. As previously approved by the Board, TOT reserve funds in the amount of \$1,680,000 have been designated to fund the County's grant match requirement for potential EDA grants. At this time, it is anticipated that \$72,000 of this funding will be needed for the grant match. Any unspent funds for this project can be allocated for future projects.

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

Economic Development- Invest in Infrastructure needs to improve and maintain competitiveness
Good Governance-Infrastructure

CONTACT

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