



Legislation Text

File #: 21-1319, **Version:** 1

Broadband Ad Hoc Committee, in coordination with the Chief Administrative Office and Planning and Building, Economic Development Division, recommending the Board:

- 1) Receive and file a presentation and report from NEO Connect focusing on Broadband planning efforts and a breakdown of Broadband grant funding sources which include with American Rescue Plan Act funds, the Infrastructure Bill and/or State funds and what the associated costs would be; and
- 2) Consider allocating \$10 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds either at this time or in the future for Broadband projects, and direct staff to continue to pursue other funding opportunities.

FUNDING: American Rescue Plan Act, Transient Occupancy Tax.

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

On September 1, 2015, following a presentation on the state of Broadband infrastructure in the County, the Board established a Broadband Technical Advisory Committee to work on broadband issues and appointed two Board members to that Ad Hoc Committee (Legistar 15-1020).

On January 12, 2016, the Board adopted Resolution 013-2016, approving the submittal of an application for an Economic Development Agency (EDA) Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program Grant to complete a Broadband feasibility study (Legistar 16-0006).

On September 27, 2016, the Board authorized acceptance of a \$75,000 grant award from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) Planning Program and Local Technical Assistance Program to conduct a Broadband feasibility study in El Dorado County and committed \$75,000 for the 50% County match required by the grant. The resolution states that improved Broadband service fits strongly within the County's Economic Development Strategic Plan and that building Broadband capacity in El Dorado 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 assembled to assist with technical expertise in the area of Broadband policy and infrastructure. This group includes members from non-profit organizations with special interests in Broadband technology and stakeholder community members. (Legistar 16-0006)

On April 25, 2017, a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Broadband Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study was launched and subsequently awarded to NEO Connect, a Colorado-based consulting firm specializing in broadband planning and analysis. A subgroup of the technical advisory group and the Ad Hoc Committee participated in the RFP evaluation process. A contract was then negotiated and executed with NEO Connect, with an effective date of September of 2017. (Legistar 17-0442)

On January 23, 2018, NEO Connect presented to the Board of Supervisors a summary of their efforts so far, including the current broadband environment and infrastructure in El Dorado County, and results of surveys and community engagement. Their presentation also included examples of policies and ordinances that facilitate broadband deployment, such as "dig once" or "shadow conduit" policies (Legistar 18-0077).

On June 30, 2020, at the request of the Broadband Ad Hoc Committee, the Board also provided direction to staff to work with NEO Connect to apply for a grant from the Economic Development

Administration (EDA). The grant is for 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 will fund a project of 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. (Legistar 20-0835)

With the pandemic highlighting the severe shortage of Broadband accessibility throughout the state particularly in rural areas, many funding sources have become available in both Federal and State programs. In addition, American Rescue Plan Act funds, which were distributed to local jurisdictions, are allowed to be directed towards infrastructure projects, of which broadband is an allowable use.

There are many aspects to take into consideration when it comes to financing broadband projects and funding programs are still being defined and the goal of this item is to provide the Board with options on how to prudently pursue future Broadband projects while fully utilizing funding sources outside of ARPA funds.

ALTERNATIVES

The Board could choose to defer providing any direction regarding the use of ARPA funds until such time that all funding requests are considered by the Board.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

See Discussion/Background above

OTHER DEPARTMENT/ AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Chief Administrative Office

CAO RECOMMENDATION/COMMENTS

The purpose of this discussion is to provide the Board with a summary of projects and costs so that when you consider allocating ARPA funds you have an understanding of the potential uses for Broadband. As a result, the Board should refrain from providing specific direction relative to the use of ARPA funds until such time that all funding requests are considered which is scheduled to occur in September or October 2021 based on prior Board direction.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this item as it is simply providing the Board with an update on Broadband efforts and estimated costs.

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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