City of Dublin

To: Dublin City Council

From: Doug McCollough, CIO

Re: Residential Broadband Internet Services

Background

City staff became aware of interests of some residents in gaining access to Broadband, or high speed Internet service through a conversation on a social media service. The discussion raised questions about the City's ability to support an expansion of availability of this service. The participants described dissatisfaction with the speed, cost, reliability, and competition of available Internet services in their neighborhoods, and made note of other municipalities that have Broadband Internet service available.

Some City staff gathered anecdotal reports of residents with questions about the future availability of broadband Internet service in Dublin in addition to the social media conversation. Staff organized events to invite residents to discuss the matter. Among those expressing interest were some with direct subject matter expertise in the technology. We acknowledged the interest and impressed upon the participants that their expertise would be a welcome resource in thinking through the issues. Two "Coffees" were organized with members of the City Information Technology and Community Relations Departments. At the limited publicity events, legitimate concerns were raised, creative solutions were proposed, and productive discussions were held on the need, options, and viability of extending Broadband Internet service to Dublin residents.

Summary Information

It is clear that demand for Broadband by all residents is expanding. Developments in technology including the Internet of Things, Wearable Computing, Automation, Augmented and Virtual Reality, and the proliferation of devices, contribute to a new definition of minimum standard for Broadband. While interested parties were located throughout Dublin, there appears to be a clear concentration of dissatisfaction clustered west of Avery Rd., where there is a gap between service providers. This area may be experiencing the most pointed need at this time.

The drivers of broadband demand include applications such as:

- Providing consistent access to students for educational purpose at home.
- Making working from home a reliable option.
- Making Tele-medicine possible.

In general, "quality of place" is a metric, which more communities are measuring themselves against, and for which residential Broadband is increasingly a key component.

Numerous models exist that address this need, including forming a public utility, attracting a wealthy benefactor such as Google Fiber, Public/Private Partnerships, and negotiating with existing carriers and service providers. Each of these models carry pros and cons, and none have been exhausted as options. There are significant risks and pitfalls to all identified models. We remain aware of competing interests at different levels of government outside Dublin, commercial and competitive interests in private industry, the need to follow a responsible cost model, and the need for any option to be financially sustainable.

Recommendations

That these interests are being expressed by residents in cooperation with City staff and with staff support represents a high expression of democracy and functional government. We seek to be responsive in support of the interests of Dublin residents. Staff recommends a continuing dialog with interested and motivated residents in a more formal setting. We need to work together to gather data, clarify intent and options, and develop proposals.

A key use of data is to determine the extent to which Broadband is *not* available due to potential shortcomings in services offered by existing carriers. While this may appear self-evident to some residents, there are oversight mechanisms such as the State of Ohio Department of Commerce and Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, whose findings can be used to work with carriers or industry to deliver residential Broadband without direct ownership by the City of Dublin. Without exhausting these resources, our residents may find other options will run into concerted opposition from both State Government and Industry.

Staff recommends formal, resident-driven sessions with the following objectives:

- Gather formal data on availability, speeds, demand, satisfaction, competition, and costs. Identify clear goals.
- Engage relevant oversight bodies, such as the Department of Commerce to exhaust their options and authority.
- Explore, research, and draft model proposals to accomplish aims consistent with the above objectives.

Staff will reach out to and invite those residents who previously participated in this discussion, as well as, broaden the invitation for other residents to attend. We will work cooperatively and in support of this dialogue to achieve the above objectives. Once these objectives are met, Staff will report back to Council on the findings of this joint effort between residents and staff and will suggest a way ahead for next steps. We are pleased to engage in this process and intend to be responsive to the needs of our residents in full support of the high "quality of place" of Dublin.