



CITY OF FERNLEY

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: August 18, 2021

REPORT TO:	Mayor and City Council
REPORT FROM:	Daphne Hooper, City Manager
REVIEWED BY:	Brandi Jensen, City Attorney
REVIEWED BY:	Denise Lewis, City Treasurer

FINANCIAL IMPACT: Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>	CURRENTLY BUDGETED: Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	FUND/ACCOUNT: ARPA Funds
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ACTION REQUESTED: Consent Ordinance Resolution Motion Receive/File

AGENDA ITEM: Staff Report (For Possible Action): Approve funding to Western Nevada Development District (WNDD) at a cost not to exceed \$2,850 to conduct a region wide broadband mapping project and approve community outreach support from the City of Fernley working with WNDD to inform and engage residents, business, and institutions to participate in broadband mapping by testing Internet speeds.

Agenda Item Brief: WNDD is requesting \$2,850 for a broadband mapping project, which is a portion of a \$40,000 project for all governmental member agencies. Further, the project will include community outreach activities to engage residents, businesses, and institutions to test internet speeds.

Recommended Motion:
“I move to approve \$2,850 from ARPA Funds to conduct a region wide broadband mapping project and community outreach support from the City of Fernley working with WNDD to information and engage residents, businesses, and institutions to participate in broadband mapping by testing Internet speeds.”

Business Impact (per NRS Chapter 237):

A Business Impact Statement is Attached.

A Business Impact Statement is not required because this is not a rule (term excludes vehicles by which legislative powers are exercised under NRS Chapters 271, 278, 278A, or 278B).

See attached report for background, analysis, alternatives.

ALTERNATIVES:

- The Council can decline the request.
- The Council can request additional information.

SUMMARY:

At the WNDD Board meeting on Monday, June 28, 2021, the broadband mapping project was presented and unanimously approved. As part of that approval, WNDD staff was directed to develop a WNDD report for presentation to all governmental member agencies recommending the \$2,850 fee per agency which will fund the \$40,000 project. This report is also to include the community outreach activities that invite participation from all the Board members to engage residents, businesses, and institutions to test Internet speeds.

The WNDD Broadband Mapping Project will produce a map of the WNDD region identifying areas at street level that are most in need of reliable, affordable access to broadband service.

This map will have GIS layers of information that will be used to develop infrastructure project grant applications for communities in the region, resulting in more robust broadband connectivity across the region.

The initial data showing connectivity gaps in service, acquired from an Internet speed test/crowd-sourced data, and the acquisition and uploading of GIS data to the map will cost \$40,000 or \$2,850 per WNDD local government member. This will be an annual subscription from WNDD members for use of the interactive GIS map.

PROJECT ANALYSIS:

Background:

WNDD is an economic development district designated by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the US Department of Commerce. It is a member-driven organization and currently has 7 counties, 7 municipalities and 18 associate members in northwestern Nevada.

WNDD's mission is to work in regional collaboration with public and private entities to create an environment within which economic development can occur.

The City of Fernley City has been a member of WNDD for many years and has participated in a number of infrastructure projects with support from WNDD. Those projects have been included in the regional WNDD Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

The Need:

Broadband connectivity across the region is generally poor. The 2020-25 CEDs approved by the WNDD Board at the June 22, 2020, meeting included a Broadband Needs Assessment Project. This was intended to be a regional project to determine the gaps in broadband service across the WNDD region. This project was never implemented due to the onset of COVID-19.

During the early stages of the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Planning Project, and development of the 2021 CEDs Update, as the planning teams met to discuss and identify issues and challenges, the number one issue identified was reliable, affordable broadband connectivity, especially in rural areas and underserved communities. This was out of a total of 63 issues identified by the teams. It was determined through this process that this would be a WNDD priority and staff began researching the subject in March of this year.

This problem is now recognized at the national level and funding is being made available to resolve the problem. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provides \$1.9T in aid to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences. Of that the State of Nevada is expecting to receive up to \$2.9 billion to address the effects of COVID-19, some of which will be allocated for projects to bridge the digital divide. EDA is expecting \$3 billion in funding from ARPA and some of that will be available for broadband infrastructure projects. In the fall of 2021, the Biden Administration is likely to announce additional infrastructure legislation which will include funding for broadband projects.

Since March, on behalf of WNDD members, staff has completed extensive research on best practices throughout the US on how to address the broadband connectivity issue in the WNDD Region. WNDD has also met several times over the last year with the Nevada Office of Science, Innovation and Technology (OSIT) regarding this issue and regards OSIT as an important resource in closing the digital divide in the WNDD region.

WNDD reached out to the Board and invited members to participate on a Regional Broadband Action Team to look into broadband needs across the WNDD region and to determine recommendations on broadband projects for the region. The team was set up in late May and comprises Tom Harris of UNR, Aric Jensen from the City of Reno, Heidi Lusby from Pershing County Economic Development Authority, Alicia Heiser from the City of Winnemucca, Lisa Granahan from Douglas County, Mark Feest from Churchill County Communications, Vas Kamyshyanov from the Balanced Agency located in Reno, Cassandra Darrough from the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe/NUMU and Eric Brown, Manager of Washoe County. The team met in early June and agreed that more data is needed to discern the areas that are in need of reliable, affordable access to broadband service. An interactive broadband map is one way of collecting and collating this data.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and other organizations produce maps which show access to broadband and other information such as download and upload speeds etc. For example, NTIA recently released a map which shows the following information for **Lyon County**. (Aggregate information for the City of Fernley could not be located):

Pop per FCC 2019 Estimate	ACS % H'holds w/o Internet Access	ACS % H'holds w/o Computers Smartphones Tablets	M-Lab Speed test Median Mbps	Ookla Speed test Median Mbps	Microsoft % of Downloads Completed over 25 Mpbs
57,509	12.80	8.70	17.01/4.86	73.82/11.21	44.00

While useful in providing overarching information at a county level, these data are not useful in pinpointing problems at the street level, or advising where to invest in infrastructure in last- or middle-mile projects to provide better connectivity to homes, businesses and institutions at the local level. In fact, some of these data can be misleading and cannot be used for grant applications for state or federal funding of broadband infrastructure projects.

The Project:

The WNDD Board-approved broadband mapping project includes two components, both of which will be managed by technical expert consultants contracted by WNDD:

- A) LOCAL INTERNET SPEED TEST: Taken by the individual on his/her computer, tablet or smartphone at his/her residence, business or institution. At the time of taking the test, the individual will enter the zip code and the survey software will do the rest. If there is no connectivity at the individual's location, it is possible to record this by going to a public library and entering this information on the survey website. The individual's response to the speed test survey will show on the map as a color dot: green for excellent, orange for average, red for poor, black for no connectivity. As more and more people take the speed test, it will be possible to see where the gaps exist in broadband connectivity in Fernley and across the wider WNDD region. The effectiveness and success of the WNDD broadband mapping project will depend on a multi-faceted, 6 - 8 week marketing campaign that will drive residents to the WNDD speed test landing page. The marketing strategy will present a call to action that will achieve an overarching benefit: expand internet access and build a stronger digital infrastructure in urban and rural communities across northern Nevada.

Drilling down further, the project will connect to the belief that every home and business in northern Nevada will have access to affordable, adequate, and reliable internet access in order to fully participate in the digital economy and society. The campaign will also tap into a sense of urgency: the availability of federal funds to help the region achieve, affordable, accessible connectivity. Messaging will also remind citizens of the need for quality, affordable broadband which became very apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when non-essential workers, students, and teachers were asked to telework or take part in distance learning.

B) THE GIS COMPONENT: The consultants contracted to create the WNDD broadband map will plot the speed test results but also add multiple GIS layers of informational data such as the location of optical fiber in the city, the location of towers and poles in the city, the cost of installing fiber at the middle- and last-mile levels, demographic and topographic information, and information usually required by federal grantors like USDA, EDA, etc. This GIS data will provide much of the information needed to prepare grant applications for projects that will bring the infrastructure that will improve broadband connectivity in Fernley.

The map will show clearly where the deficiencies are in broadband connectivity across the city, but more importantly it will supply accurate data for grant applications for state and federal funding which can be used to close those gaps.

It is anticipated that unprecedented amounts of money from federal and state sources will be available in the near future to address the broadband problem. To access those funds, communities need to have well planned, well designed projects. A good mapping tool will help greatly in this process by making grant applications for state and federal funding much more competitive.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

INTERNET SPEED TEST AND GIS DATA COMPONENT - \$40,000 WITH AGENCY CONTRIBUTION OF \$2,850

Membership Cost - \$2,850 – anticipated to become an annual member fee to ensure ongoing testing and ongoing access to current and accurate data.

These funds will support the contractual services to be obtained to conduct the internet speed testing that will result in the GIS Data map. There will be ongoing updates to the map to ensure current and accurate data.

Below is the scope of work to be required of selected consultant:

Consultant Scope of Work:

1. Build the website and weblink for the online speed test to be taken by residents across the region;
2. Create the software and make available to capture the speed test data online;
Plot the speed test data on a map of the WNDD region in an easy-to-read format;
3. Create a multi-layered GIS map by up-loading information on the WNDD region in GIS format such as the location of optical fiber, location of towers and poles, the cost of installing fiber, demographical and topographical data, and other information relevant to applying for funds for broadband infrastructure projects;
4. Train WNDD staff and members on how to use the GIS map as a tool to apply for grants for funds for broadband infrastructure projects;
5. Provide assistance as needed by WNDD members as they apply for broadband infrastructure projects grants.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH

WNDD will develop the community outreach materials to solicit participation from residents, businesses and institutions to test internet speeds. Each agency will partner with the outreach effort by providing existing agency outreach materials and communications being utilized to invite participation with the speed test.

The marketing material packet provided by WNDD will include copy and graphics for agency website, email newsletters, social media, cable access and print such as flyers, and/or brochures. Production of short videos will also be engaged featuring community leaders to invite participation from citizens to take part in the speed tests. Financial support for this activity will be provided through sponsorships obtained through the WNDD.

PROJECT BENEFITS:

The broadband map will:

- Demonstrate broadband speeds at street level;
- Show where improvements in connectivity are needed;
- Demonstrate to the community the City Councilmembers' commitment to strengthen and expand broadband connectivity;
- Support state and federal grant applications with accurate data for broadband infrastructure projects;
- Encourage collaboration in developing projects for state and federal funding and resolving the digital divide;
- Become the gateway to resources resulting in a network of greater connectivity across the community.

The broadband map is a regional project with regional impact. It will result in economies of scale and efficiencies in implementation, and greater internet connectivity across the region.

This mapping project will start the conversation on broadband deficiencies. Broadband connectivity is extremely hard to define and made more difficult in the case of the WNDD region as it is a diverse region with a mix of rural and urban communities, dense and sparse populations, open and mountainous areas, wealthy, moderate- and low-income areas etc.

Connectivity due to bandwidth is not the only problem. There are affordability issues - where adequate broadband is available but not affordable; device problems where there are not enough devices in a household to access the available internet; and knowledge issues where there is not the understanding and knowledge on how to use the internet and the equipment, even though they are both available. So, there are many problems making broadband connectivity complicated, and the selection and design of projects challenging.

