

Orange County Broadband Initiative

March 16, 2016

Orange County has been working with a group of concerned Orange County residents and the North Carolina Information Technologies Services' Office of Digital Infrastructure to improve Internet service around the County. This effort has been often called the Orange County Broadband. This is a summary of accomplishments and action items in the past year and upcoming work.

Accomplishments

- *Ongoing throughout 2016* | **Orange Public and Education Network (OPEN) Workgroup Formation** This workgroup is comprised of the heads of all local government and public education organizations within and including Orange County. Although not necessarily specific to broadband expansion, OPEN meets monthly to explore ways to share technology resources for the benefit of Orange County's residents and workforce. To date, there have been 4 meetings.
- *Ongoing throughout 2015 and 2016* | **Orange County Broadband Status Meetings and Conference Calls** Orange County residents and staff together with staff from North Carolina's Office of Digital Infrastructure hold a monthly conference call to discuss resident broadband needs and work on solutions. Since this date last year, 10 meetings/calls have been held.
- *Ongoing throughout 2015 and 2016* | **Working with Service Providers** Orange County staff contacted AT&T and Century Link to determine whether they would be expanding their network in Orange County with funding received from the FCC's [Connect America Funds](#). AT&T and Century Link have accepted Connect America Funds to provide broadband over the next 6 years to several parts of North Carolina, potentially including [sections of northern Orange County and smaller areas in western Orange County](#). However, the final areas where service will be expanded have not yet been reported. Staff also contacted Time Warner to check if they were planning to expand their service area and Google Fiber to see if service would be deployed in Orange County.
- *Expected completion May 2016* | **Expanding Wireless Service** Orange County is working with Time Warner to facilitate public wireless Internet access at the following locations: the Farmer's Market Pavilion, Cedar Grove Community Center and athletic fields, downtown Hillsborough, the Churton Street Corridor, and Fairview Park. Additionally, Orange County is continuing to increase and expand wireless access points at Cedar Grove Community Center, Efland-Cheeks Community Center and Little River Park. Public wireless Internet access is now available outside all County buildings.
- *March 21, 2016* | **Library HotSpot Loaner Pilot Program** The pilot program will enable Orange County citizens to access the Internet at home using loaner hotspots that connect to the cellular phone network. Hotspots are available to be checked out at the Main Library and Carrboro Library branches. Once the success of the pilot is determined, the program will be expanded.

- *March 1, 2016* | **Wireless Communication Vertical Asset and Land-Based Site Identification** County staff together with staff from NC's Office of Digital Infrastructure traveled throughout Orange County identifying potential sites where wireless service equipment could be set up.
- *December 15, 2015* | **Internet Service Provider Meeting** Staff coordinated a meeting with Internet Service providers and Orange County residents to share the results of the broadband survey, identifying underserved areas of the County so that providers can use this information to expand their networks or improve existing service. This meeting resulted in proposals from two wireless service providers.
- *September 28, 2015* | **NC Rural Assembly Broadband Conference** Orange County staff explored models for expanding rural broadband. In addition, County staff has contacted several Internet Service Providers, municipalities, counties, state and federal experts to research models for expanding rural broadband and their applicability to Orange County.
- *Results published December 29, 2015* | **Broadband Survey** Orange County staff conducted a survey to help identify Orange County households with inadequate Internet service options and to learn residents' reasons for dissatisfaction with their Internet service. The survey identified several areas of the county that are underserved. Results were sent out to over 600 residents who requested to receive them in addition to being shared with staff from the State of North Carolina and Internet Service Providers. The Broadband Survey results can also be found on Orange County's website by navigating to Information Technologies' departmental page.
- *March 6, 2015* | **Community Meeting** County staff coordinated a meeting of Orange County Citizens, and local and state officials to brainstorm ideas for broadband expansion in the County. The meeting was attended by State Representatives Verla Insko and Graig Meyer, State Senator Valerie Foushee, and Orange County Commissioners Barry Jacobs, Earl McKee, and Renee Price. Citizens noted the lack of high speed Internet service negatively impacts the ability to work at home, complete homework, and property values. The group agreed to a process recommended by representatives of the North Carolina Information Technologies Services' Office of Digital Infrastructure which has been successful in other areas of the state:
 - Survey Orange County residents to identify underserved areas of the County
 - Provide this information to Internet service providers (ISPs)
 - Identify available public vertical assets
 - ISPs use survey results and inventory of vertical assets to come up with proposals for expanding broadband service area
- *November 2014 – Current Date* | **Calls and Emails Received from Orange County Residents** Orange County staff has processed hundreds of emails and calls from Orange County residents directly addressing the issue of broadband expansion in the county for either business or educational purposes.
- **Calls Made and Emails Sent on Behalf of Orange County Residents** County staff continue to call and send emails to vendors on behalf of Orange County residents in an effort to improve broadband services in the Orange County.
- **Identifying Sites for Telecommunication Towers** As part of an emergency services upgrade, County staff continues to identify possible sites for telecommunications towers. The towers can

be used to provide wireless broadband service to nearby residences (this typically requires line of sight access between the residence and the tower). The County has also streamlined the permitting process for erecting telecommunication towers on certain pre-identified sites as depicted on the Master Telecommunication Plan map. While these towers still have to comply with all applicable submittal and review requirements the tower has the potential to be administratively acted upon (i.e. staff approval).

Upcoming

- *Projected completion date July 2016* | **High Speed Internet at New Cedar Grove Community Center** A high speed internet connection will be installed at the new Cedar Grove Community Center, which will include a library kiosk, and several workstations for public wireless Internet access in and around building.
- *March-April 2016* | **Information Request** IT staff is working with the County's Public Affairs office and the Library to respond to a request from the NC Office of Digital Infrastructure to provide content to post on the State's website.