

Orange County Broadband Initiative

October 28, 2015

Orange County has been working with a group of concerned residents and the North Carolina Information Technologies Services' Office of Digital Infrastructure to improve Internet service around the County. This is a summary of the accomplishments of this workgroup and its upcoming work.

Accomplishments

- **Held 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
- **Explored Models for Expanding Rural Broadband.** County staff has contacted several ISPs, municipalities, counties, state and federal experts to research models for expanding rural broadband and their applicability to Orange County.
- **Expanded Wireless Service.** The County worked with Time Warner to provide Wi-Fi along Churton Street in downtown Hillsborough. The County installed free Wi-Fi at Little River Park and outside all County buildings.
- **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).
- **Conducted Broadband Survey.** 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.

- **Working with Service Providers.** 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 determined. Contacted Time Warner to check if they were planning to expand their service area. Checked whether Google Fiber would be deployed in Orange County.

Upcoming

- **Service Provider Meeting** (*4th Quarter 2015*). Coordinate a meeting with Internet Service providers 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.
- **High Speed Internet at New Cedar Grove Community Center** (*2nd Quarter 2016*). Provide high speed internet connection 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
- **Library HotSpot Loaner Program** (*TBD, Potentially 3rd Quarter 2016*). The program will enable Orange County citizens to access the Internet at home using loaner hotspots that connect to the cellular phone network. Hotspots would be checked out at County libraries and library kiosks. The project is being explored and is contingent on receiving a [Library Services and Technology Act](#) grant.
- **Expanding Wireless Service** (*1st Quarter 2016*). Working with Time Warner to install wireless at Orange County's Farmer's Market Pavilion, Cedar Grove Recreations Facilities, and Fairview Park.