Charles City Evaluates Community-Owned Fiber Broadband Network

CHARLES CITY — August 17, 2016 — The public is invited to attend a Fiber Town Hall Meeting on August 30th to learn more about a possible community fiber broadband network in Charles City. The meeting will be held at 6:30pm on Tuesday, August 30th in the Zastrow River Room at Charles City Public Library.

"Like several other communities in Iowa, Charles City is considering whether a fiber optics network, owned and operated as a city utility, is an option for guaranteeing fast, affordable, reliable, and universal access to broadband services," says Curtis Dean of SmartSource Consulting Dean was hired by the City and the Broadband Commission to conduct a Community Broadband Engagement and Education Project in Charles City. The goal of the project is to determine whether citizens support additional steps, including a full feasibility study.

Background

Between 1994 and 2005, over two dozen communities in Iowa established municipal telecommunications utilities and constructed networks to serve those citizens. These utilities have a proven track record of providing reliable and affordable voice, video, and data services to their residents and putting those communities in charge of their own technological futures.

In 2005, citizens of Charles City approved a referendum to establish a municipal telecommunications utility by an 62% majority. Like many other communities that took that initial step, the concept was not immediately explored further, in large part because incumbent providers promised better service in the future. And although some improvements were made, over time community leaders have come to feel that Charles City is in danger of being left behind as other communities get access to state-of-the-art fiber to the home (FTTH) networks.

In 2010, the city conducted a survey to measure community interest in a municipal broadband utility and found strong interest. The need for better broadband has only continued to grow in the past six years, especially

the explosive growth of internet traffic. The rapid adoption of streaming video, also known as over-the-top video (OTT) has dominated this growth, and is expected to continue to grow rapidly as new OTT video service options become available to consumers. Also, more and more users are relying on cloud-based computing and storage for doing business and managing their households. New data-reliant services such as smart home, smart grid, remote health care, and remote education will also push the "need for speed" ever higher.

Also during the six years since the initial study in Charles City, internet users have become more sensitive to service reliability. In 2010, an internet outage was seen as a nuisance for many users. Today it's seen as a major interruption in normal daily living comparable to a power outage. While incumbent providers have generally increased internet speeds on a regular basis, reliability problems continue to affect their aging copper-based networks.

As a result of continued concerns about the long-term health and viability of the community, the City of Charles City joined with ten other Iowa communities to study the feasibility of a fiber network to interconnect the communities. If built, that regional network will greatly enhance the viability of new local fiber networks in communities like Charles City.

Community Meetings

A series of stakeholder meetings are being held to gather input from educational, governmental, business/economic development, and health care leaders. The Fiber Optics Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, August 30, 2016 is aimed at providing general information to all Charles City citizens and gather their input.

In addition to community meetings, a website has been established for citizens of Charles City and other exploratory communities to learn more about the concept and share their thoughts. The website is www.ourbroadbandfuture.com, and includes general information about community broadband as well as information specific to the Charles City study. Citizens can also discuss the concept on Facebook at www.facebook.com/charlescitybroadband.

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